

**Disability inequality and the recruitment process: responding to legal and technological developments**

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates how recruitment and selection practices impose social barriers for disabled people in the UK labour market. Despite the growing use of online recruitment methods adopted by employers, current literature has neglected the reactions of job applicants to web-based recruitment and selection practices from an equality perspective, in particular the voices and experiences of disabled jobseekers and their unequal access to the Internet.

The research foregrounds the concepts of inequality regimes and the ideal worker to show that social barriers and disability discrimination occur within recruitment and selection practices and can result in disability inequality, as well as gender, race or class inequality. This thesis demonstrates that the notion of the ideal worker—in general a masculine notion—is embedded within society and the labour market, and is formed around ableist norms of ‘ideal qualities and behaviour’ that a worker should have, and which views disabled people as less productive compared to non-disabled people. These implicit ideas about the ideal worker can have a significant, although often unintended, effect on recruitment and selection practices and produce inequalities in organisations.

Through 22 qualitative, semi-structured interviews with disabled jobseekers and employment advisors from two disabled people’s organisations that worked with these individuals, and 12 interviews with employers over a one-year period, accounts of disability inequality embedded within traditional and online recruitment and selection practices are studied. This research has been designed around emancipatory principles of disability research and emphasises the importance of the social model of disability for disabled people and the disabled people’s movement in the UK. Likewise, it contributes to theoretical literature on the extended social model of disability to highlight that disability occurs because of social oppression associated with relationships, at both the macro and micro scales, between impaired and non-impaired people. The aim of this study has been to represent as genuinely as possible the needs and voices of disabled people and their organisations in order to challenge social arrangements that lead to disability inequality, in recruitment and selection practices via the Internet.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This thesis explores whether and how recruitment practices in the UK labour market create social barriers for disabled people attempting to get into employment. It challenges the taken for granted assumptions underpinning the recruitment process and in particular the underlying commitment to finding ‘the best person for the job’ or ‘the best person for the organisation’ by use of ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’ recruitment practices. The thesis suggests that there needs to be greater awareness of ableist norms that are embedded within organisational practices and that lead to inequality. This thesis considers the growing implementation of online recruitment practices and the practical difficulties and advantages of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), in particular the Internet, for disabled people. While the Internet has created new potential and possibilities for empowerment and self-advocacy (Seymour and Lupton, 2004; Seale, 2007; Trevisan, 2017), access to the Internet and the design of this online world can also be disabling (Easton, 2013). The thesis explores what it is like for individuals with learning difficulties and for individuals with visual impairments when they apply for a job online, in particular the reality of online recruitment practice and the barriers it creates. An extended social model of disability is the framework adopted for understanding this, which challenges the medical view of disability, and at the same time highlights the way that disability occurs because of social oppression associated with relationships, at both the macro and micro social scales, between impaired and non-impaired people (Thomas, 1999; 2004a; 2004b; Reeve, 2014). The notion of the ‘ideal worker’ is used to show how taken for granted ableist norms tend to cause disabled people—who might be able to do the job but do not fit the implicit criteria associated with the ideal worker—to be rejected during the recruitment process (Acker, 1990). This study is led by disabled people and the disability studies literature rather than the recruitment literature, because mainstream debates on recruitment fell short to record and recognise the agenda of disabled people and their organisations, even though the employment gap between non-disabled and disabled people has been a deep-rooted and apparently obstinate problem. Thus, this study approaches research from the disability studies debate to discover these deeper experiences of disablement that jobseekers can experienced in the labour market, in interaction with organisations and during their job searches online, which can be part of the lived experience of disability.

## **Disabled people and recruitment processes: the need for new theory and practice**

Since the 1970s, the Disabled people's movement, disabled people and others within this debate have argued for a social model of disability to understand how society produces social barriers and thus creates a disabling environment for people with impairments (Oliver, 1996; Barnes, 1997). As such, disabled people are disadvantaged in important areas of social life, such as education, employment, political participation or access to public goods and services (see, Barnes, 2012; ONS, 2012; ONS, 2016). For example, disabled people of working age have lower employment rates compared to non-disabled people within the UK labour market, because they have been rejected as inferior labour by employers (Abberley, 2002; Grover and Piggott, 2005). This is highlighted by figures from Labour Market Statistics 2016, which show that only 48.3 per cent of disabled people, compared to 80.5 per cent of non-disabled people are in work. This rate is even lower for people with learning difficulties at around 23.9 per cent (ONS, 2016).

There has also been a growing debate on the way Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), in particular the Internet, have impacted on disabled people and other social groups in society leading to the concept of a 'digital divide' (Dobransky and Hargittai, 2006; Vincent and Lopez, 2010; LFS, 2015; Eurostat, 2016). While the Internet has provided an opportunity for empowerment, self-advocacy and networking (Seymour and Lupton, 2004; Seale, 2007; Trevisan, 2017), for many people, including disabled people, this virtual world has evolved as a 'disabling environment'. It is argued that the Internet has been built based on ableist norms around the 'ideal end user' and thus ignores individual differences (Easton, 2013). Even though governments have pushed for the adoption of accessibility standards to the virtual world, the concept of accessibility takes for granted socio-economic contexts, such as, the availability of accessible infrastructure or computer training offered to the public (Abscal et al. 2016), but also socio-relational factors, such as age, educational attainment or financing, which can have an impact on access to the Internet for disabled people (Easton, 2013; Scholz et al. 2017). The use of web-based tools in recruitment practices could therefore result in an adverse impact on disabled people and their search for employment.

The thesis uses the social model of disability—a materialist view of disability—as a framework for understanding what is happening in the process of recruitment. This accepts that disabled people face physical barriers and social exclusion, which impact upon their experiences of employment/non-employment (see Finkelstein, 1980; Oliver, 1990; Barnes,

1991). Combined these experiences have been defined as social (UPIAS, 1976; Oliver, 1990), socially constructed (Barnes, 1991), structural (Reeve, 2004) or socio-structural barriers (Thomas, 1999) and describe key features of ‘the landscape of social exclusion’ (Thomas, 2004b: 34).

By moving the focus of research onto the ‘extended social model of disability’ (Reeve, 2004), this thesis contributes to the literature by analysing disability not only at the public, but also at the private level. Here disability can be understood as ‘personal’ experiences of oppression, which are produced at the emotional level (Thomas, 1999). Rather than individualising these experiences, which many social modelists have criticised, this view locates the cause for psycho-emotional disablism in relation to social barriers external to the individual and tries to understand individuals’ experiences and responses to them (Thomas, 1999; 2004a; 2004b; Reeve, 2014). Thus, social oppression is not only experienced because of structural disablism (barriers to doing), but also because of psycho-emotional disablism (barriers to being) (Reeve, 2013: 122). For the purpose of this thesis, both dimensions of disablism are defined as social barriers that individuals with impairments might encounter in society.

While debates of internalised oppression and social interactions with others is not new to disability studies, this inclusion of oppressive relations with the self and others contributes to new insights of disability (Reeve, 2004). By incorporating both structural and psycho-emotional disablism as defined by Reeve (2004), this thesis intends to demonstrate a more nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of disability in society. The focus of this analysis is therefore on relations with past employers or colleagues or the self and individuals’ interaction with the online recruitment process. These can lead to experiences of indirect and direct psycho-emotional disablism, which can be part of the lived experience of disability.

The experience of direct psycho-emotional disablism and responses to social barriers can be linked to the concept of ableism, particular internalised ableism, which can result in disability discrimination. Ableism is the belief that person’s abilities or characteristics are shaped by disability or that disabled people as a group are considered inferior to non-disabled people (Linton, 1998; Campbell, 2008; 2009). Ableism demonstrates that there are dominant practices, processes and beliefs within certain social groups and social structures that value and promote certain abilities over others (Wolbring, 2008). The intention of this thesis is to use the concept of ableism to provide insights into the question of whether disability inequality had impacted on the job search experience of disabled people.

In recent years, scholars in the human resource management field have highlighted the growing use of online recruitment processes and how practices can be successfully adopted in organisations (Galanaki, 2002; Chapman and Webster, 2003; Parrry and Tyson, 2008; Parrry and Wilson, 2009; Maurer and Cook, 2010; Lee, 2011). The focus of these studies was predominately on the organisational perspective and the reasons behind an organisation's decision to recruit online, thus there has been only limited research on the negative impact of relocating recruitment and selection practices to the Internet (Cappelli, 2001; Maurer and Cook, 2010). The recruitment literature has predominately adopted a technocratic view of the recruitment process, rather than viewed it as a social process, where power relationships between both parties, the jobseeker and the recruiting organisation are established (Searle, 2009; Byron et al. 2013). In fact, there is little known about the reactions of job applicants to web-based recruitment and selection (R&S) practices (Dineen et al. 2002; Anderson, 2003; Thompson et al. 2008) from an equality perspective. Only a small number of studies have highlighted the impact of race or gender inequality on online job searches (Kuhn and Skuterrud, 2000; Wallace et al. 2000), and little research exists that concentrates on the experience of disabled people when they engage with online recruitment processes. As a contribution to this equality research, this thesis investigates how these growing web-based recruitment and selection tools impact on job search activities of disabled people and in what ways employers are aware of the social barriers that it can impose for disabled jobseekers.

By adopting the concepts of the 'ideal worker' and 'inequality regimes' (Acker, 1990; 92; 2006), this thesis shows that online recruitment as an organising process may result in disability inequality. The concept of the ideal worker—in general a masculine notion—is embedded within society and the labour market, and is formed around ableist norms of 'ideal qualities and behaviour' that a worker should have, which views disabled people as less productive (Foster and Wass, 2013; Granberg, 2015; Jammaers et al. 2016) and is manifest within organisations. These organisations produce inequality regimes which Acker (2006) defines as loosely connected practices, processes, actions and meanings, that can result in and preserve class, gender, and racial inequalities in society and organisations. While Acker (2006) has acknowledged disability inequality within organisations, it has not been given adequate consideration. A growing number of critical management scholars urge the inclusion of disability as an inequality dimension within approaches to job design and organisations (Harlan and Roberts, 1998; Williams and Marvin, 2012) and highlight its potential for better understanding disability inequality within organisations (Foster and Wass, 2013). This thesis intends to rectify this gap by showing how social barriers and disability

inequality occur within the online recruitment process and they can be understood within the context of inequality regimes. The study will argue that employers ignore that taken for granted ableist norms, which are embedded within the design of online recruitment practices, can exclude some disabled jobseekers from seeking and applying for jobs online.

While equality law has been adopted to challenge disability inequality, there has been criticism around the definition of disability used within the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (now replaced by the Equality Act 2010), which is informed by a medical model and also the reactive reasonable adjustment duty contained within the Act in the employment context. Thus, when UK employers rely on the Act's definition they might inadvertently contribute to disability inequality within organisational practices, because the definition centres on what the individual is unable to do. It does therefore not challenge ableist norms around 'ideal qualities and behaviour' of the ideal worker embedded within the organisation (Acker, 1990; Ganberg, 2015).

This thesis suggests that the UK government should acknowledge its human rights duty under the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006 (CRPD), that it ratified in 2009. This would mean that employers have to recognise that it is not impairment that is the main cause of social exclusion of disabled individuals, but rather the way that society responds to people with impairments. Thus, change is needed to remove social barriers that prevent full and effective participation in society and the labour market of disabled people on an equal basis with others (Barnes, 2011; Lawson, 2011). This thesis considers that while some employers view disabled people as valuable and are adopting voluntary tactics to recruit these workers, further legislative change efforts by the government are vital to challenge taken for granted ableist norms embedded within organisations and wider society.

Taking these theoretical and empirical debates into consideration the purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the disability studies and organisation and management literature from an equality perspective to explore whether and how online recruitment practices in the UK labour market impose social barriers for the employment of disabled people.

### **An overview of the research process**

This thesis has identified two gaps within the disability and organisation and management literature. First, the disability literature (see Chapter 2) demonstrates that there is a gap within emancipatory approaches to disability literature and that the voices of individuals with visual

impairments and the voices of individuals with learning difficulties were only limitedly represented (Walmsley, 1997; Chappell and Lawthom, 2001; Duckett and Pratt, 2007). Second, quantitative data (see Chapter 3) suggests that the likelihood of having Internet access is much lower for unemployed individuals who have an impairment compared to those who have no impairment (Pilling et al. 2004; LFS, 2015; Scholz et al. 2017). Thus, there is a clear indication within the Labour Force Survey 2015 data that barriers to access the Internet exist for unemployed individuals in the UK. These numbers are even higher for individuals who have visual impairments or learning difficulties, which might have an impact on their job searches, in particular when recruitment practices are relocated to the Internet. Up until now, there has been no research that has concentrated on investigating the psycho-emotional impact of online recruitment practices for these groups. This thesis tries to rectify this gap and contribute to this literature by including the voices of individuals with learning difficulties and visual impairments within this study. However, to fully capture the picture of these evolving online recruitment practices, this study has also selected HR managers and HR advisors responsible for operationalising recruitment practices in UK organisations, as another group of the population. These people are able to speak on behalf of their employers and can help clarify whether UK employers are aware of social barriers that disabled people face in regards to recruitment processes. Gaining insight of both perspectives, the jobseeker and the recruiting organisation, is able to contribute to the recruitment literature that views online recruitment as a social process.

The research methodology (see Chapter 4) adopted for this study consisted of 34 qualitative semi-structured interviews to give voice to participants by representing their stories, experiences and opinions. The voices shared in the process of the research include the perspectives a) disabled jobseekers, b) of employment advisors from two disabled people's organisations, who have worked closely with the disabled jobseekers, and c) perceptions of employers, who have found ways to challenge disability inequality within their recruitment practices. Interviews were conducted over a period of a year (2014-2015) and took place in the South, Midlands and North of England. This research specifically looked at change strategies advocated by disabled jobseekers and aims to answer how disability inequality embedded within online recruitment practices can be challenged.

### **The role of language in disability studies**

Language plays a significant role in disability research, because in the past positivist approaches to disability research used many words and meanings that were offensive towards



disabled people, and thus misinformed their experiences (Oliver, 1996). The use of definitions of impairment and disability informed by the social model of disability are said to be essential when undertaking emancipatory disability research, because they are more likely to reflect the experience of disabled people within society (Oliver, 1990; Barnes, 1991).

Yet, as a researcher within this field, one has to consider that there are well-known debates that surround disability and language between UK and US/Australian approaches in the way studies describe the exchange between society and impairment (Harpur, 2012). In the UK, scholars use the label disabled person and not the term persons with disabilities because the latter it is understood as attributing the disabling effect to the person and not to society (Clark and March, 2002). The word 'disabilities' refers to the medical condition in this perspective and is therefore confusing disability with impairment (Clark and March, 2002). Accordingly, some UK scholars define disability based on a social model understanding that some individuals have impairments, and that society is responsible for turning those impairments into disabilities (Harpur, 2012). While research on disability in Australia and US has highlighted social, cultural or political dimensions of disability, the social model and the distinction between impairment and disability has not played much of a role in the fight for social change and civil rights (Shakespeare and Watson, 2002). In these countries, disability is positioned behind the individuals to highlight that they should not be described in terms of their disability (Harpur, 2012). Thus, American and Australian scholars argue that the label 'disabled person' defines the individual more by their attribute and not their humanity.

Moreover, it is also important to comprehend that the disability community has not created the actual word disability themselves, but it has been used to politicise the causes of disablement (Harpur, 2012). The term disabled goes far back to the period where society discounted the value and contribution of individuals with impairments. It underpins the notion that the person with a different ability is the opposite of able. By using the prefix 'dis' to differentiate between people with different abilities, it is argued that it has an even stronger meaning than being the polar opposite, and hence attracts a large amount of negative history. This prefix might have been justifiable under the medical model, however under the social model, the term 'disability' is not perfect. Nonetheless, compared with the negativity with previous labels used, the term 'disability' was arguably an improvement (Harpur, 2012) and is now commonly used within UK disability research that is informed by the social model of disability (Oliver, 1992; Barnes and Mercer, 2004).

Furthermore, this study acknowledges that there were a number of nouns used historically in the English language, such as 'idiot' or 'fool', to label people who have lower intellectual ability now described in different ways as 'learning disabilities', 'learning difficulties', or 'intellectual impairments' (Davies and Jenkins, 1997; Dumbleton, 1998). These labels have replaced older terms of mental status or degrees of intelligence, such as 'mentally defective' or 'mental handicap', thus narrowed the focus to a characteristic of the mind, in particular the ability to learn, yet, these new terms have unconsciously embraced to emphasise the lack of socially desirable characteristics (Dumbleton, 1998). The current terminology not only reflects the social significance of learning, but also continues to marginalise by identifying groups that fail to possess the most socially describe attribute of society (Dumbleton, 1998). Within disability research, Chappell (2001) and other scholars, such as Oliver (1999) and (Goodley, 2001) indicate that if people with a lower intellectual ability would define themselves they prefer to use the term 'learning difficulty'. This term is in line with the terminology chosen by the self-advocacy movement for and by people with learning difficulties, which was advocated by People First a disabled people's organisation in the UK, founded in 1989 (People First Scotland, 1997; 2014; Stalker, 2012). This advocacy group reminds people of what they can do as opposed to what they cannot do, as 'people first' (Goodley, 2001; Stalker, 2012). While acknowledging the criticism around the current terminology, this study has adopted the term 'people with learning difficulties', because that is the preferred name of the self-advocacy movement.

Likewise, there has also been a similar change from historically used terms such as 'the blind' or 'the unsighted' that described individuals who have no or limit sight, to the term 'visual impairments' (Bolt, 2005; Duckett and Pratt, 2007). It has been said that the term 'the blind' has not only suggested the existence of a homogenous group, but of one that is opposing to 'the sighted' group, different in relation to an assumed ableist norm (Bolt, 2004; 2005). While the terminology of visual impairment has corresponded with an individual/medical model of disability, insights from a social model of disability have shifted the onus of limitations from the individual onto society (Oliver, 1996). The shift from the individual model to a social model understanding is reflected in the person-first ideology, that individuals with visual impairments are not inevitably disabled, but when they are so, the society in which they live is inevitably disabling (Bolt, 2005). While acknowledging the criticism of using this terminology, this study has used the term 'visual impairment' in line with a social model perspective.

This UK based research has therefore adopted the terms disabled person, people with visual impairments and people with learning difficulties throughout the research process. This study supports the perspective shared by scholars and activists in saying that society has a disabling effect on individuals, but also keeps in mind that these terms are not essentially the best to refer to people with impairments, however it is the one that most people recognise.

### **Structure of the thesis**

Chapter 2 sets out a theoretical framework by reviewing the literature that can be applied to address the research questions for this study. It investigates the meaning of disability from a historical perspective and contrasts the divide between the two principle models of disability, the social and the medical model. It sets out the way in which disability and ableism have been conceptualised by particular scholars and the ways in which theory and concepts of disability studies can be used to understand practices within the labour market and in interaction with organisations. This chapter advances the argument for an extended social model of disability framework. This model is able to capture not only structural barriers, as identified by the social model of disability that restrict disabled people from job seeking activities, such as inaccessible environments or discrimination in employment, but also psycho-emotional barriers. Psycho-emotional disability can have an impact on an individual's wellbeing and view of self as a worker through for example internalising ableist norms. These psycho-emotional barriers exist in interaction with structural barriers. Thus, this chapter acknowledges the concept of ableism and the experience of internalised ableism as included in the conceptual framework. This helps to explore these deeper experiences of disability that individuals with impairments experience in the labour market and in interaction with organisations that have nothing to do with their impairment, but that are purely social in origin.

Chapter 3 reviews the organisation and management studies literature to show how concepts of the ideal worker and inequality regimes can be used, and have been used, to comprehend how organisations and organisational practices result in disability inequality. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that social barriers related to disability occur within online recruitment processes and they can be understood within the context of inequality regimes. This chapter shows that there is a gap within the HRM literature on the awareness of employers of social barriers to the use of online recruitment practices. This literature on recruitment has widely engaged in debates around psychometric and contemporary approaches to recruitment and selection as supposedly 'fair' and 'neutral' practices and has

demonstrated that issues of unconscious bias can occur during this process. However, it has failed to acknowledge that the job requirements used within recruitment and the practices itself are built around ableist norms that value certain abilities over other. Moreover, the recruitment literature predominately views recruitment as a technocratic process, rather than a social process where a relationship between the individual and the recruiting organisation is established. The chapter demonstrates that scholars have only begun to view the recruitment process from this societal perspective and underlines the importance to adopt this perspective to understand the interactions that individuals have with organisations during this process. Thus, this chapter shows that there are only a few studies that highlight the inaccessibility of e-recruitment websites or job boards as structural barriers for disabled people. It demonstrates that no empirical studies exist that investigate the experiences of disabled jobseekers in interaction with organisations and their responses to these social barriers encountered when they engage with this new online form of recruitment by using the extended social model of disability and the concept of ableist as conceptual framework. The chapter concludes that while equality law, such as the Equality Act 2010 has the potential to remove disability inequality within the employment context (Lawson, 2011), further change efforts by the UK government in line with a social justice/human rights approach are required to support this change.

Chapter 4 sets out the research design and practice adopted for this study. It explains the study's qualitative methodology adopted and reflects on the role of the non-disabled researcher. The study is situated within an emancipatory research design and takes the limitations and methodological consideration into account when adopting this approach to disability research.

Chapter 5, 6 and 7 present the empirical findings from the interviews with a) disabled jobseekers, b) of employment advisors from two disabled people's organisations, who have worked closely with the disabled jobseekers, and c) perceptions of employers, who have found ways to challenge disability inequality within their recruitment practices. In each chapter I am looking to answer the research questions examining how is disability experienced by people with impairments in the labour market and in interaction with organisations, in what way disabled people were actively engaging with recruitment processes and developing their own strategies during job searches and applications via the Internet, whether employers were aware of social barriers imposed by online recruitment practices, and how disability inequality, embedded within these practices, can be challenged. The

findings demonstrate that there are a number of actors not just employers that create disabling barriers for disabled jobseekers in the labour market.

Chapter 8 concludes this thesis by bringing together the theoretical and practical outcomes from this research, which has contributed to the literature on disability inequality within the recruitment process. The theoretical analyses, which demonstrated the importance of equality, helped identify disabling social relations and structural barriers that disabled people might encounter by employers and their online recruitment practices, which have led to experiences of direct and indirect psycho-emotional disablism. Contributing to the analytical framework of inequality regimes, disability as a dimension has highlighted that organising processes of Jobcentre Plus, libraries and employers produce disability inequality, because practices are designed around taken for granted ableist norms embedded within society. The ableist norms identified in this thesis are: a worker has to be productive and able-bodied; the Internet is easy to access; it is available to everyone in accessible public spaces; and by using this medium for recruitment, barriers to access potential employees, since everyone is online. Equality law, such as the Equality Act 2010, has the potential to remove disability inequality within the UK labour market, but only combined change efforts inside and outside organisations can successfully challenge disability inequality. This thesis suggests that the UK government has to recognise a social justice/human rights approach when enforcing legal compliance and organisations have to view online recruitment as a relational process, to challenge taken for granted ableist norms and promote effective change.

## **Chapter 2: Disability and Ableism**

This chapter begins by considering the way in which disability and ableism as conceptual tools have been deployed by particular scholars within the theoretical and empirical literature, to understand what disability is, and how it is experienced by individuals with impairments within the labour market and in interaction with organisations. It investigates the meaning of disability from a historical perspective and contrasts the divide between the two principle models of disability, the social and the medical model. This chapter acknowledges how the idea of historical materialism has informed the sociological understanding of what constitutes disability. The primary focus of this chapter is to reflect on different sociological understandings of disability and highlight why the ‘extended social model’ is central to the understanding of how disabled people experience the labour market (Thomas, 1999; Reeve, 2014). This debate is important to understand in that social exclusion from employment is not only experienced due to structural disablism (barriers to doing), but also because of psycho-emotional disablism (barriers to being) (Reeve, 2013: 122). This chapter demonstrates that there is only limited research that has adopted this view of disability in research, particular in organisation and management studies literature. Moreover, it is also essential to consider how ableist norms and assumptions have influenced society’s view of disabled people. These norms are embedded in the way that organisational practices are designed, they can influence social relations that disabled people have with non-disabled people and can also impact on an individual’s view of self as a worker. The secondary focus of this chapter is to explore how the concept of ableism can be used to understand whether and how employers impose social barriers (albeit often unwittingly) within their organisational practices and the extent to which they are aware of it. Organisational and management studies literature is only at the early stages of incorporating this concept of ableism within research for and with disabled people. One important goal of this chapter is to identify a theoretical framework that can be applied to address the research questions for this study. Both theoretical concepts of disability and ableism will be contested in order to argue that both of these concepts are essential for this thesis, because they both contribute to our understanding of the lived experiences of disability in the labour market and in organisations.

## **The social model perspective on disabled people and the labour market**

Definitions and experiences of what disability is differ from society to society and rely on a whole range of material and social causes. In the UK, there remains a noticeable divide between two principle models of disability, the medical and the social model (Oliver, 1996; Thomas, 2004a). From a medical model perspective disability is perceived to be caused by illness or impairment that leads to pain and some social disadvantage, whereas from a social model view disability is associated as being primarily organised by oppression, inequality and exclusion (Thomas, 2004a). This section reflects on the development of the social model of disability in social science research and how it can be used and has been used to explain the oppressive social experiences of disabled people in the UK labour market and in wider society.

Before the emergence of disability studies as a field, social science research was primarily concerned with understanding disability from an individualist viewpoint, where sociologists were interested in the reactions to and management of disability as ‘ascribed social deviance’ (Barnes et al., 2002; 3). Barnes et al. (2002) point out that a prominent example of this account has been the work of Goffman’s *Stigma* (1968), where he differentiates between the interactions of ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ people. From this view, disability is perceived to be the inevitable product of an individual’s biological defects, illness or characteristics – that is, in terms of impairments (Priestley, 1998). Hence, disability is situated within the individual (rather than within society) and is seen as ‘personal tragedy’ (Oliver, 1990; Swain et al. 2004) needing medical intervention and individual adaptation to overcome the disability. Barnes (1985) argues that society viewed the presence of disabled people as a threat to the health of others in society and consequently there was a need for segregation, rejection and discrimination of people who were considered ‘different’ or ‘other’.

While disabled activists and academics have been central to the mobilisation of the earlier disabled people’s movement in the UK, the opposition to this orthodox view of disability in society and within academic debates came from disabled people themselves (in the UK and worldwide) rather than from the academy (Barnes et al. 2002). Collectively they challenged the medical model of disability in the 1970s through the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) with leaders such as Vic Finkelstein and Paul Hunt, and disabled activists and academics such as Mike Oliver and Colin Barnes. They countered the medical model by theorising disability as the failure of society, and this approach is consciously designed to take the needs of individuals with impairments into account (Oliver,

1990; Priestley, 1998). From this socio-materialist position, disability can be better understood as being related to material relations of power (between disabled people and non-disabled people) within a specific historical context (Oliver, 1990). Hence, the relationship between the material environment and the individual can limit a person's activity and is mediated by the particular characteristics of the society of which the individual is a member. Every type of society then presupposes some basic division of labour, for instance the once assumed 'natural' division between the sexes: man being the breadwinner and women being responsible for taking care of the domestic work, or in the case of disability; a division between non-disabled and disabled workers (Erevelles, 1996). This understanding of disability was adopted by the British academic Mike Oliver, who took up the ideas of the UPIAS (1976) and incorporated them in the notion of the 'social model of disability'. It derives from a materialist origin and is linked to the concept of historical materialism, to explore how it was that disabled people came to be oppressed within capitalist societies. The UPIAS definition of disability adopted in the 1970s was:

"The disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excluded them from the mainstream of social activities" (UPIAS, 1976 in Oliver, 1996:35).

Oliver (1996; 2004) contends that this definition of disability argues that it is not impairment that is the main cause of social exclusion of disabled individuals, but rather the way that society responds to people with impairments. This model distinguishes between impairment and disability. Barnes (1991: 2) elaborates that impairment can be defined as a 'physical, mental or sensory functional limitation within the individual', whereas disability on the other hand is referred to the 'loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers.' Consequently, the disabled people's movement redefined the term 'disabled people' to mean: 'people with impairments who are disabled by socially constructed barriers' (Barnes, 1991: 2). However, the original definition of impairment was limited to physical conditions and only later broadened to include sensory impairments or learning difficulties (Barnes, 1999; Oliver, 1999). This was in acknowledgment of the fact that physical conditions, but also learning difficulties can lead to psychosocial consequences imposed by a disabling society.

Thus, from this historical materialist perspective, disability is not produced and maintained as a consequence of 'negative attitudes' or 'oppressive meaning systems', but rather this view



tries to uncover the real material conditions that were responsible for generating these attitudes or meaning systems of disability in the first instance (Erevelles, 1996; 525). The aim of social science research that positions itself from this perspective has been to investigate where disabled people are placed within these dominant social relationships of production, why this position has produced concepts of disability that are exclusionary and exploitative, and how this position aids capitalism (Erevelles, 1996).

Earlier social modelists, such as Finkelstein (1980; 2001), Barnes (1985) and Oliver (1990), pointed out that capitalism led to the development of work methods, such as the standardisation of job tasks or new technology that were detrimental to those with impairments. These work methods were designed for non-disabled people so that they, not people with impairments, were able to perform them in the most efficient way to extract the highest rate of profit. From this perspective, Erevelles (1996) and Harlan and Roberts (1998) argue that these changes under capitalism meant that organisations were built on the basis of ableness, and skills and measures of productivity were highly subjective, thus intrinsically excluded individuals who were not perceived as being able to undertake productive work in line with these imposed job requirements (Erevelles, 1996; Harlan and Roberts, 1998).

To explore in what way disability impacted on the experiences of individuals with impairments, the social model approach is adopted in this thesis, and in line scholars, such as Oliver (1990; 1996; 2004) and Barnes (1996; 2001) this study tries to demonstrate that social barriers are responsible for the inequality and social exclusion that disabled people face in society, in particular in the labour market and in interaction with organisations. Within disability research that focused on identifying the experiences of disabled people from a social model perspective, the perspectives of individuals with learning difficulties and individuals with visual impairments have been ignored. The next section shows that this approach can be helpful to understand how these groups have encountered their searches for employment.

### **Expanding social model research**

As it stands, there has only been limited research that accounts for the experiences of people with learning difficulties from the social model perspective (Oliver, 1990; 1996; Chappell et al. 2001). However, Chappell et al. (2001) highlight that self-advocacy movement for and by people with learning difficulties has illustrated elements of a social model. This movement was advocated by People First a disabled people's organisation in the UK, founded in 1989

(People First Scotland, 1997; Stalker, 2012), carried the views and actions of people with learning difficulties into the public domain. This movement has explained individuals' experiences of oppression, because of negative labelling, rather than due to social or economic structures. However, scholars, such as Stalker and Lerpiniere (2008) point out the significance of the social model in explaining the experiences of individuals with learning difficulties within society. They explain that although individuals with learning difficulties might not face material barriers, which are experienced by those with physical or sensory impairments (albeit people with learning difficulties can also have other impairments), they can face barriers concerning information provisions, such as inaccessible formatting, the use of jargon or complicated language (Stalker and Lepiniere, 2008). Thus, individuals with learning difficulties are likely to experience social barriers because of reactions or behaviour from non-disabled people, which Thomas (1999) refers to as, impairment effects (discussed below).

Moreover, Duckett and Pratt (2007; 2001) note, there has also been an absence of research that concentrates on highlighting the experiences of individuals with visual impairments from a social model perspective. These scholars have argued that when writing their paper in 2006, there has only been one participatory study (see, Papadopoulos, Scanlon and Lees, 2002) to empower visually impaired people through the research process. Yet, even this study had its flaws, in that it had a positivistic epistemological underpinning, which is not consistent with an emancipatory approach to research, see Chapter 4 (Duckett and Pratt, 2007). Given this gap within disability research, this study tries to contribute to the literature that takes the views and experiences of individuals with visual impairments and learning difficulties into account from a social model perspective. The social model of disability presents a way to look beyond individuals' impairments. It can be used to analyse in what way society's response to people with impairment can be disabling and impacts on individuals' labour market experiences.

### **Critiquing the social model of disability**

Within the disability studies literature, there is a debate about whether the social model of disability is able to capture the lived experiences of disability that individuals with impairments have in the labour market and in interactions with organisations. This section demonstrates that despite this progressive shift in understandings of disability, the social model has been critiqued from within and outside the disabled people's movement as being limited in representing the experience of disabled people in society. The study takes into

account the criticism (by feminists, postmodernist and poststructuralist sources) of the social model that has been growing almost from the beginning it emerged in 1983 (Oliver, 2013), but persists that this model is the right one to use within a study that seeks to analyse the experiences of disabled people in the labour market and in interaction with organisations.

This critique of the social model arose in part from disabled people (activists and academics) themselves, arguing that the social model does not fully connect with the experience of impairment, and it fails to represent the experience of disabled individuals in their own body (Morris, 1991). Morris (1991) argues that the social model has a tendency to deny the experience of one's own body and the pain of impairment: physical and psychological. The social model focuses on the environment and social attitudes but not personal experience of physical and intellectual restrictions (Morris, 1991). Moreover, French (1993) recognises that the personal experiences of impairment are not accommodated within this view. Elaborating, the latter author argues that her visual impairment imposes social restrictions that cannot be resolved by the application of the principles of the social model. For instance, she mentions her inability to recognise people because of her impairment. The social model of disability would not be able to help her with this restriction.

This criticism has been acknowledged by Oliver (1996) and he argues that the social model was not an attempt to deal with personal restrictions of impairment, but to highlight the social barriers of disability, as defined by the UPIAS above. He does not deny the pain of impairment, referring to Morris' argument, stressing that the social model tries to identify and address issues that can be changed through collective action, and not through medical or professional treatment. Liz Crow (1992, 1996) criticises further that the social model lacks an integration of the experience of impairment with the experience of disability, the external and internal constituents that they bring to an individual's experience. She adds that there is nothing fundamentally difficult or unpleasant about other group's embodiment, skin colour, sexuality or sex, because these are neutral facts. However, being an individual with impairment can lead to a difficult or unpleasant experience of one's own body, which sets disabled people apart from other socially oppressed groups (Crow, 1996).

Nonetheless, supporters of the social model of disability insisted that there is no causal relationship between impairment and disability, because impairment is said to be biological, whereas disability is created by society (Oliver, 1996). The disabled people's movement wanted to break the link between bodies and social situations, to focus on the real cause of disability, such as the discrimination individuals may encounter in society. The social model

views disablement as a consequence of social oppression and not personal tragedy, thus it has nothing to do with the ability of one's body (Oliver, 2009).

In addition, some scholars said that the social model did not take other forms of discrimination into account such as racism (Hill, 1992) or sexism (Morris, 1991). Morris (1991) explains that experiences of Black and ethnic minority disabled people, disabled gays and lesbians, and disabled women intersect with the experience of being disabled. She stresses the struggle of sexism, racism and heterosexism affects us all and should be seen as an integral part of disability politics. Zarb and Oliver (1993) acknowledge this criticism and they encouraged incorporating multiple oppressions into the social model, however they personally had not yet explicitly addressed other aspects of discrimination.

### **A postmodern critique**

A further criticism from scholars such as, Tom Shakespeare and Nick Watson originates from a perceived shift from 'modern' (capitalist) to a 'postmodern' society and the way this new thinking comprehends social trends and disability. Corker and Shakespeare (2002) emphasise that a postmodernist view refers to philosophical ideas, mainly derived from post-structuralist theory and cultural formations, and are not a claim of material reality. Hence, postmodern approaches recognise that it is impossible to tell an exclusive or single story about something that is complex, such as disability (Corker and Shakespeare, 2002). Thus, Shakespeare and Watson (2001) contend that impairment does play a role in causing disability, but that both social barriers and impairment create restrictions. Shakespeare and Watson (2001) argue that it is difficult to establish conceptually where an impairment stops and the disability starts, therefore one needs to understand disability as being influenced by psychological, biological and socio-political factors, which cannot be disentangled entirely.

Barnes (1996; 2012b) responds to this critique by arguing that the social model is first and primarily a focus on the environmental and social barriers that exclude disabled people from society. The social model attempts to change these aspects of the lives of disabled people that can and should be changed. Barnes elaborates that it does not deny the importance of impairment, nor assert that once the barriers have been removed the problems associated with certain types of impairments will disappear. However, he explains that the way that 'people deal with impairments', whatever the causes and the condition, is set in many ways by their access to social and material resources (Barnes, 2012b).

The major criticism that emerged from these scholars is that the social model of disability ignores to take into account the experiences of impairment or the body as some define it. While it is important to understand the collective experience of disability that individuals encounter as a group, because of material relations between those in power over financial resources and the way work is organised, individual perspectives of disability are also important to acknowledge. These perspectives can demonstrate that experiences of disability might differ for every person and their form of impairment.

One scholar, Carole Thomas, has tried to show that the earlier social model has been able to allow for these experiences to be explained, by offering a social relational understanding of disability, which is further discussed in the next section. It has been argued by Thomas (2004 a, b) and other scholars, such as Reeve (2006; 2012) and Williams and Marvin (2012) that additional social perspectives on disability can be added to the earlier social model that has only focused on structural and economic determinants of disability. These new perspectives concentrate on understanding the behavioural determinants that can produce disability and allow to explore personal experiences of disability, impairment/impairment effects or the role of dialogue in producing disability through social processes. Thus, adopting this view can enhance organisational research for and with disabled people, as it can create a space to explore social relations with non-disability. This includes the construction of non-disability as assumed able-bodied, normative expectation, and experiences of impairment, not yet included in social model research (Williams and Marvin, 2012).

The social model has been important for research to show that disability occurs on a macro-level scale, in that structures, policies and attitudes affect the lives of disabled people in society and in the labour market as a group. While this view is still relevant for understanding disability, there has been a shift in emphasis to adopt a micro-level analysis. This micro-level can demonstrate that disability is experienced by individuals on a more personal and emotional level, which can lead to deeper experiences of disability. These personal experiences of disability might hinder individuals to sustain employment, in interaction with the 'outer' barriers that they experience, as a disabled person. By adopting this social relational understanding of disability research can demonstrate in what way these different levels of analysis interact and contribute to experiences of disability in the labour market and in interaction with organisations.

The next section demonstrates how this social relational understanding of disability is vital for this study and in which way it can help to explore the experiences of disabled people in

the labour market, without ignoring the significance of the social model and the overarching understanding of disability as socially constructed.

### **The social relational understanding of disability**

As mentioned above the social model alone is not appropriate for a study that seeks to explore individuals' experiences with disability in the labour market and in interaction with organisations, in particular their engagement with the online recruitment process during their job searches. This macro-level analysis is not able to demonstrate how individuals with impairments react to discrimination experienced within work, during their job searches and in what way this can impact on their emotional wellbeing and their view of self as a worker. The relational understanding of disability would help address this gap, because it takes into account personal experiences of disability at this micro level scale. This section will explore in more depths how this social relational view of disability can be used as a conceptual tool for this research.

Thomas (1999; 2004a; 2004b) demonstrates that in the early stages of the social model, Finkelstein's original interpretation of disability had incorporated a social relational character that understands social oppression associated with relationships, at both the macro and micro social scales, between impaired and non-impaired people. Thus, the definition of the UPIAS mentioned above does not assert that all restrictions of activity are externally caused. Thomas argues that the social relational qualities of Finkelstein and Hunt's understanding of disability in the 1970s were weakened or even lost once the social model of disability was formed. In fact, what was lost in their understanding was that:

'Disability only comes into play when restrictions of activity experienced by people with impairments are socially imposed, that is, when they are wholly social in origin' (Thomas, 2004a: 580).

This social relational view, as Thomas elaborates, makes it indeed possible to acknowledge that impairments and chronic illness are directly causing some restrictions of activity. However, what is important to acknowledge are that these non-social imposed restrictions of activity do not constitute disability. Her view acknowledges that non-socially imposed restrictions might be better captured by the concept of 'impairment effects'. As such, Thomas (1999: 60) defines disability as:

‘A form of social oppression involving the social imposition of restrictions of activity on people with impairments and the socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional wellbeing.’

She explains that impairment and impairment effects should not be naturalised or dealt with as pre-social biological phenomena. They are completely biosocial and shaped by the interaction of social and biological factors and are inseparably connected with ‘processes of socio-cultural’ naming (Thomas, 1999). Thomas elaborates that just as social barriers can be experienced in the form of imposed restrictions of activity in the external environment, as currently recognised by social modelists (e.g. Oliver, 1990), there are also social barriers, which erect ‘restrictions’ within disabled people, and therefore limit their psycho-emotional wellbeing, for instance, feeling ‘hurt’ by reactions and behaviour of non-disabled people that makes disabled people feel ‘worthless’ or of lesser value. This ‘inner world’ dimension of disablism is therefore connected to these socio-cultural processes, which generate negative attitudes towards impairment and disabled people, and sustains stereotypes, images or prejudicial meanings (Thomas, 1999). This can lead to experiences of internalised oppression as discussed below, which some individuals with impairments might experience in the labour market and in interaction with organisations.

### **Direct and indirect experiences of psycho-emotional disablism**

Taking on Thomas’s viewpoint, Reeve (2004) explains that this debate about social relations between disabled people and non-disabled people in society has always been present within disability studies. She refers to Goffman’s (1963) work on stigma that gave a detailed account of the way that non-disabled people interact with disabled people. In his book, he described stigma as a ‘social product’ that is shaped by social relations in which possibly discrediting attributes can influence on the assumptions or the behaviour of either the stigmatized or the ‘normal’ group (Goffman, 1963; Green, 2009). However, some scholars, such as Finkelstein (1980) criticise his work in that he failed to provide a true account of disabled people’s oppression and for presenting such social relations as unavoidable. Finkelstein (1980) argues that for Goffman, who refers to the early Greek society, society is taken as given and that the imposing of stigma is defined from the standpoint of the ruling classes as a tool to label the ‘socially unusual’. He adds that when stigma is neutralised as the natural task of naming the ‘unusual’, then it can be viewed as something owned by disabled people. Likewise, other critical scholars such as Link and Phelan (2001) or Hannem and Bruckert, (2012) emphasise the role of power in stigma. The latter authors developed a

theoretical perspective that identifies stigma as multi-level. Thus, stigma is symbolically attained in individual relations and is also structurally embedded in the cultural values, practices and instructions of a society. This social power behind stigma differentiates it from stereotype or prejudice. While a stereotype is a categorisation that can either be negative or positive, prejudice refers to the approval of these categorical stereotypes (Solanke, 2017).

Reeve (2004) acknowledges Finkelstein's (1980) criticism and explains that for many people within society it is indeed these reactions of others, which affect their psycho-emotional wellbeing and indirectly limit their activity. Consequently, this experience should be seen as a significant part of disablism (Thomas, 1999). She urges that it may be appropriate to re-examine this concept of stigma by using a more recent sociological perspective, such as internalised oppression, which is one aspect of psycho-emotional disablism, and is described by Mason (1990: 28) as:

‘Internalised oppression is not the cause of our mistreatment; it is the result of our mistreatment. It would not exist without the real external oppression that forms the social climate in which we exist.’

Individuals within a marginalised group in society experience this form of disablism when they internalise the prejudices held by the dominant group, therefore essentially ‘invalidating themselves’ (Reeve, 2012). Likewise, non-disabled people also internalise norms about disability. Reeve (2012) explains that when individuals become disabled later in life they might face a challenge, because they move from the included to the excluded group and have to overcome their own prejudice about disability. Reeve (2004) elaborates that the ‘extended social model of disability’ includes not only socio-structural barriers and constraints that discriminate and exclude disabled people, but also social practices and processes that have an impact on the psycho-emotional wellbeing of people with impairments. Thus, Reeve (2004) explains that both dimensions, structural and psycho-emotional disablism, are able to interact and are responsible for the social oppression of disabled people in society. As mentioned in Chapter 1, structural disablism, operates from the outside of individuals, such as inaccessible environments, social and physical forms of exclusion, discrimination in employment that restrict an individual's activity (Reeve, 2004; 2012; 2014). Psycho-emotional disablism, included in the extended social model of disability, is a form of social oppression that undermines the emotional wellbeing of individuals with impairments, which can lead to ‘inner’ barriers that impact on individuals' self-confidence (Reeve, 2012). Reeve (2012) argues that these ‘inner’ barriers were overlooked in any analyses of the lived experiences of



disability and research prioritised to analyse the ‘outer’ barriers of disablism. Thus, she urges for an inclusion of these experiences in the analysis of the social model. Both dimensions of disablism are defined in this thesis as social barriers, yet to distinguish between them Reeve’s terms of structural and psycho-emotional disablism are adopted.

Research that concentrates on understanding the recruitment process therefore requires attention to socially constructed barriers that restrict individuals’ activity, but also social practices and processes that impact on the psycho-emotional wellbeing of people with impairments. Both understandings of disability are important to get a full picture of the recruitment process. For instance, the social model demonstrates that disabled people face discrimination in recruitment because of unconscious bias and shows that individuals might not declare their impairment and ask for reasonable adjustments because of past discrimination encountered. The extended social model of disability adds to this another layer of analysis. It shows the impact the whole process of declaring or not declaring has on individuals’ emotional wellbeing and how it can be disabling, and thus establishes why individuals respond in one way or another to this question on the job application. Thus, it is not enough to only be attentive to the former experiences of disability, but the focus of research should also be on understanding individuals’ emotional response to these barriers. The social relational understanding of disability can help demonstrate that recruitment practices adopted to help reduce discrimination might ignore the emotional background that individuals bring to the recruitment process and can lead to further experiences of disability at the personal level.

Furthermore, Reeve (2014) explains that it is also possible to separate two sources of psycho-emotional disablism, direct and indirect psycho-emotional disablism. First, direct psycho-emotional disablism can arise because of ‘acts of invalidation’ through looks, words or actions from social relationships that a disabled person has with others or from the relationship that a disabled person has with themselves, which can be a real barrier during job searches (Reeve, 2014). These personal experiences of disability are sustained through imagery, cultural representation and actions and can maintain disability inequality, as effectively as public experiences of disability, such as structural disablism. For instance, it is not just the experience that a disabled person has with past employers or colleagues that might be disabling, but there is also the ‘existential insecurity’ connected with being uncertain in what way the next employer or colleague might behave (Reeve, 2012: 80). Thus, some individuals might also experience internalised oppression, as mentioned above, when they

internalise and maintain the negative stereotypes of disabled people as workers in society (Reeve, 2004; 2012; 2014).

Second, disabled people might also experience indirect psycho-emotional disablism, which is associated with the experience of structural disablism that indirectly 'restricts activity'; (Reeve, 2014; Thomas, 2004a). These experiences of structural disablism recognise the psycho-emotional consequences of exclusion and discrimination, which serves to remind individuals that they are different, in addition to emotional reactions such as feeling hurt or anger of being excluded. Reeve (2012) explains that these 'spatial barriers' can affect the lives of individuals with impairments on different levels. For instance, poor housing can limit someone's choice of living or inaccessible public spaces can decrease the social contract that individuals have with others. Indirect psycho-emotional disablism can have an impact on individuals' emotional wellbeing and sense of self and thus can therefore have a 'cumulative negative impact' gradually on the self-confidence of an individual (Reeve, 2006; 2012).

Since Reeve has introduced these two dimensions of psycho-emotional disablism, there has been no further research that has explored this understanding of disability. Within her work, Reeve (2012; 2014) demonstrates how relationships between carers, family members, friends or the public can lead to experiences of direct psycho-emotional disablism. Her research contributes to an understanding of the lived experiences of disability. For instance, she shows that being stared at in the public because of visible impairments can impact on an individual's view of self. These continuing experiences in the public sphere might lead to individuals' acceptance of ableist norms or they might try to challenge them. Similar, her research has shown that some individuals who need a wheelchair later in life might face restrictions when entering their workplace, because of an inaccessible building. This can impact on an individual's emotional wellbeing and some people might leave their job due to the continuing experiences of feeling excluded and humiliated on a daily basis from entering their workplace. However, Reeve (2014) also adds that not every disabled person might experience psycho-emotional disablism, because resistance is possible. In addition, it can also be different depending on the type and visibility of the impairment, and the cultural messages attached to disability within a particular society. Thus, psycho-emotional disablism might take different forms in other countries, such as the UK.

This thesis tries to contribute to this debate in the context of employment. Thus, the focus of this analysis are social relations with past employers or colleagues and experiences of the online recruitment process and how these experiences can lead to indirect and direct psycho-

emotional disablism during job searches and applications. This view has the potential to contribute to new insights of the employment relationship and the recruitment process in that it is not just inaccessible or inefficient recruitment practices or unconscious bias that exclude individuals from employment, but the continuing experiences of exclusion and individuals' emotional responses to them. Scholars (Reeve, 2004; Thomas, 1999; 2004a; 2004b) acknowledge that institutional, and direct discrimination is undeniably the greater foundation of underemployment and unemployment of disabled people. However, by taking on this extended social relational understanding of disability (Reeve, 2004; Thomas, 1999) research can show that some disabled individuals might not feel confident to apply for a specific job even though they are highly qualified for doing it, because they have internalised the negative value and stigma towards disabled people in society. Likewise, it can also demonstrate that disabling recruitment practices might exclude disabled jobseekers from applying for jobs. While the structural barrier of social exclusion from job searches online and offline can itself stop some individuals from seeking employment, it also acts as a continuing reminder of being different and can lead to feelings of frustration that these experiences impose on disabled people. Thus, some individuals might give up with applying for jobs because of continuing experiences of exclusion, or they might conceal their impairment to prevent experiences of discrimination by employers, even though they have a right to request reasonable adjustments. Research should therefore recognise that an extended social model approach does not only analyse that social barriers impose external oppression onto disabled people, but also that relations with others and the self can lead to internal oppression. These experiences can place tangible obstacles in front of disabled individuals (Thomas, 2007). It is therefore important to further investigate internal oppression and individual experiences of it. This research therefore intends to contribute to this field of research.

Summarising, this section has demonstrated in line with Thomas (1999; 2004a; 2004b; 2007) and Oliver (1996; 2004; 2012) that the social model should continue to remain a powerful organising principle and a practical tool. However, as Thomas (1999) argues within disability studies, as academic discipline, there is the need to rediscover the social relational understanding of disability because it adds to knowledge of how disability is experienced. This would acknowledge the limited nature of the social model of disability for academic purposes that Finkelstein (2001) and Oliver (2004) also recognise that by itself it should not be seen as a definition or theory of disability and should not be used as a substitute for a theory. This thesis aims to add to the theoretical literature of the 'extended social model of

disability' because this perspective allows for a macro and micro analysis of disability and has the potential for bringing insights into the personal experiences of disability (Thomas, 1999; Reeve, 2004). It is important to get a better understanding of the processes and practices associated with employment and in particular recruitment, because these can impact on the experiences of disability that individuals with impairment have in the labour market and in interaction with organisations.

Thus, this study not only focuses on investigating individuals' experiences of external oppression, but also considers that individuals might face internal oppression. However, to achieve a better understanding of the current theoretical and empirical debates on disability, the next section introduces the concept of ableism. This concept has recently been used in relation to disablism and the marginalisation of disabled people at work (Williams and Marvin, 2012). The next section takes things forward by setting up the conceptual space to explore how ableist norms devalue certain abilities over others. This has been missing in the disability studies literature. As will be demonstrated, the concept of ableism is in particular appropriate within an analysis of recruitment because ableist norms are deeply embedded in the design of these practices. This concept can help explain the personal experiences of disability that disabled people might face in the labour market which are socially constructed in nature. Thus, it highlights that ableist norms embedded within society and organisations, disable individuals with impairments in the labour market and in interaction with organisations.

### **The concept of ableism**

From the above it can be said that the literature within social sciences and disability studies is predominately concerned with highlighting practices and production of disablement or disablism, especially, attitudes and barriers that contribute to the marginalisation of disabled people within society (Oliver, 1996, Barnes and Mercer, 2004). The main point of the social model of disability is to unpack disablism (Thomas, 1999; 2007), which Campbell (2008) refers to as a set of norms and practices that stimulate differential or unequal treatment of individuals on account of their real or assumed impairments. Conceptually, the notion of ableism builds on the social model of disability, due to the socially constructed nature of disability (Jammaers et al. 2016). This view links to the theory of social construction of gender, race and class in organisations and society (Acker, 1990, 1992; Cockburn, 1991), that has provided valuable comprehension into how work is structured to replicate and reproduce the hegemony power of elite white, able-bodied man (Harlan and Roberts, 1998).

Within the earlier literature on ableism, academics, such as Campbell (2001; 2008; 2009) and Wolbring (2008) have reflected on this concept and its significance for further empirical studies. Historically, ableism has been linked with sexism or racism, on the foundation that these groups lack certain abilities of the governing group in society, specifically, compared to white men (Wolbring, 2008). Wolbring refers to ableism as:

‘A set of beliefs, process and practices – based on abilities one exhibits or values - A particular understanding of oneself, one’s body and one’s relationship with others of humanity or species and the environment, and includes how one is judged by others (2008: 252-253).’

He argues that ableist norms are a reflection of an attitude of certain social groups and social structures that value and promotes certain abilities, such as competitiveness or productivity, over others such as empathy and kindness. This type of ableism as Wolbring (2008) argues in his previous works (see, Wolbring, 2004) is supported by the medical model, as it rejects the ‘variation of being’, biodiversity notion and categorization of disabled people under the social model of disability. Thus, it leads to the view of society that one should fix the impaired person or prevent people from being born with an impairment, rather than accept or accommodate individuals in their diversity of being (Wolbring, 2008).

Similarly, Campbell (2001) elaborates that these networks of ableist beliefs, practices or processes produce a particular kind of self and body that is viewed as the flawless, ‘species typical’ and therefore essential fully human. Disability in comparison is then seen as the inferior state of being a human. Regimes of ableism, as she defines it, can therefore have a substantial impact on disabled people in society. She explains:

‘regimes of ableism have produced a depth of disability negation that reaches into the caverns of collective subjectivity to the extent that the notion of disability as inherently negative is seen as a naturalized’ reaction to an aberration.’ (Campbell, 2009: 166)

Campbell (2009) explains that central to the regimes of ableism are two core components: the notion of the normative, and the implementation of a constitutional divide, between the perfected naturalised human and the abnormal non-human. This constitution contributes to the blueprint for the scaling and characterising of human beings and the arrangements of their terms of relationship. Campbell (2008) adds that ableism is often used interchangeably with disablism and stresses that these concepts provide a radically different interpretation of the position of disability to the norm. From her perspective, disablism relates more to the

production of disability and the social construction of disability understanding, whereas ableism is more linked to the production of ableness, the flawless body, and creates a neologism that weakening of ableness leads to disability. Goodley (2014) demonstrates that Campbell's view shifts the attention away from the problem of disablism (the marginalised 'other') towards the problem of ableism (the dominant). He explains that other identities, such as race, gender, and class unite around the problems of disability as a consequence of efforts to contend what Campbell (2009) calls 'ableist normativity'. Consequently, disabled people, poor people, people of colour, queer people, children and women share an 'other' space to that of the dominant group established on ableist, heteronormative, adult, white, high income society's ideals (Goodley, 2014). From this view, ableism is also related to other dominant processes and the objectification of some societal groups over others, partly depended on the process of 'ableist normativity' (Goodley, 2014).

From a different viewpoint, Harpur (2009; 2012) explains that both disablism and ableism are in essence used to describe the same concept, because they both seek to explain discriminatory or abusive behaviour towards people based upon their physical or cognitive abilities. Harpur claims that disablism is concerned with the issue of disability, and debatably, retains its focus upon the individual with a disability as a contributing factor to the discriminatory act. He therefore suggests using the concept of ableism, which concentrates more on the behaviour of the discriminator without making a reference to the person with a disability. The performance of an ableist act or use of a phrase by a discriminator refers to discrimination towards an individual based on their level of ability or disability (Harpur, 2009). He urges to use the concept of ableism within disability research, because it has the potential to concentrate the attention on all groups in society who act in a discriminatory conduct towards individuals that do not meet the physical standards. Whereas, disablism is more restricted as it only focuses on individuals in society that are labelled disabled, ableism focuses not specifically on disabilities, but rather on those acts and behaviours, which assume that an individual has to meet the physical standards set by a certain group in society (Harpur, 2009). This will shift the attention upon the act of ableist discrimination, rather than diverting the focus on an individual's disability.

The section demonstrates that both concepts, disablism and ableism, can be used to explain the experiences of individuals with impairment in society and in the labour market. Besides ableism, the concept also centres on the idea of internalised ableism, which is used simultaneously to the concept of internalised oppression from which it originates (Campbell, 2008; Reeve, 2012). The next section investigates how it is useful to explain why disabled

people adopt ableist norms in order to fit into this ableist society that is expected of workers in the labour market and in interaction with organisations.

### **Internalised ableism**

This section begins by arguing that the concept of internalised ableism is identical to the concept of internalised oppression, and scholars such as Campbell (2008) has used it interchangeably within her study of ableism and more recently Reeve (2014) in her paper on direct psycho-emotional disablism. Campbell explains that internalisation can be explained by accepting disability at the level of beingness, an ontological acceptance, as a fundamental part of the person's self, the processes, practices or beliefs of ableism, similar to that of racism, encourage an internalisation of hatred for oneself, which depreciates disablement. She expands on her argument by saying that this ableist viewpoint is embedded within our culture and perceives impairment (irrespective of type) as fundamentally negative that should be at first instance cured or indeed eliminated (Campbell, 2008).

In order then to adjust to the ableist norm, disabled people have to embrace, indeed to adopt an identity other than their own. Disabled people can experience internalised ableism, because of the constant reminder of this construction of their provisional and (real) identity by others (Campbell, 2008). This can lead to a state of 'passing', which is 'a form of camouflage to sequester the self from expected trauma', commonly used to describe experiences of gay men or lesbians (Leary, 1999; 85). Thus, disabled individuals become complicit in their own 'passing' by unconsciously performing ableism – reinforcing impairment as outlawed ontology. Impairment is defined as a characteristic within the body, yet despite being characterised as permanent, it is in a broader sense temporary and subject to being cured, corrected or indeed eliminated. As such, all individuals regardless of their status are shaped and formed by the 'politics of ableism' (Campbell, 2008).

Moreover, Brune and Wilson (2013) add that 'disability passing' is a complex and wide-ranging topic, and that disabled people are constantly confronted with the choice to hide their disability or draw attention to it. They explain that passing goes way beyond the individual and can have largely social, cultural and political implications. Still, disability passing has not yet received adequate attention by scholars in the field of organisation and management studies. Research on passing focused predominately on other protected characteristics such as race, gender or sexuality and have failed to accept that disability is a fundamental component of a person's identity. However, Brune and Wilson (2013) argue

that passing is more than just an acceptance and internalisation of the stigma of disability. They explain that the meaning of passing varies widely and can represent a challenge to power rather than merely an acceptance of stigma and oppression. Even if it appears to strengthen the stigma of disability, passing is more productive, and more reasonable, and can be seen as a way to confront the ableism that requires the individual to pass (Brune and Wilson, 2013). Thus, passing can take a form of 'passive resistance' as Schlossberg (2001) referred to in relation to gay people. This means, that by engaging in personal strategies of passing it can protect the disabled person from hostile judgment. In the employment context this might mean that disabled people might not declare that they are disabled to an employer, because they fear that discrimination might take place and that by telling the employer they might have an unequal chance of being selected for the job.

This section has demonstrated that disabled people might experience internalised ableism or internalised oppression, because of ableist norms adopted in society that view disabled people as less worth, less able or in need to be cured. These ableist views are also said to be embedded within organisations and some scholar, yet only a few scholars have tried to investigate disabled people's experiences in the workplace, which is discussed in the last section.

### **Production of ableism in organisations**

Jammaers et al (2016) state that there is an emerging literature that has applied ableism as a concept to organisations that focus on exploring how disabled employees are discursively constructed as less able, less willing and less productive workers and thus are less valued and/or employable to workplaces. Yet, these studies emphasise the important role of language in normalising negative representation of disabled people as deviant, unproductive and unemployable and thus excluded from work or subordinated within organisations (see, Foster and Wass, 2013). Literature informed by ableism predominately highlighted the disciplinary power of language (Foucault, 1977), to analyse how dominant representations of disabled people are disabling, by paying relative little attention to how disabled people themselves engage within spoken or written communication in the workplace (Williams and Marvin, 2012). For example, Jammaers et al. (2016) wanted to get a better understanding of how language exercises power in disabled people's own identity work. They explored how disabled employees justify their being in the organisation and create positive workplace identities amid the negative ableist discourse of lower productivity.



Moreover, scholars such as Harlan and Roberts, (1998); Williams and Marvin, (2012) and Foster and Wass, (2013) have pointed out that it is important for research to acknowledge that disability is not a characteristic of individual workers, but is an integral part of the organisational culture. Williams and Marvin (2012) suggest that when organisational and management research include the social relational aspect of disability, research can demonstrate that non-disability as normative expectation is constructed in the labour market and in interaction with organisations. This can have an impact on the way disability is experienced by individuals with impairments. Adopting this way of thinking about how organisations discriminate against individuals with impairments is valuable, because it allows for a deeper analysis of organisational practices because it raises doubt about the way these practices are designed. A more recent empirical study by Foster and Wass (2013) has shown that organisational practices have been designed around ableist norms of the ‘ideal worker’, further discussed in Chapter 3, which can disable individuals with impairments. For instance, jobs are designed with the ableist norms in mind, which might duplicate an ideology that individuals with impairments are not fit to do productive work. Other studies demonstrated that disabled people are constantly experiencing discrimination in employment interviews (Vedeler et al. 2014) and feel constrained in disclosing their impairment in order to prove to employers or co-workers that they are able to be as productive as non-disabled workers (Lingsom, 2008; Von Schrader et al. 2013). Moreover, while reasonable adjustments (making changes to the working environment) are able to alter some barriers encountered by disabled people at work, many employers are still reluctant to make allowances for them (Foster, 2007; Foster and Wass, 2013). In fact, Jammaers et al. (2016) and Foster and Wass (2013) contend that reasonable adjustments are not able to challenge the way work is organised around ableist norms, because they disturb the established (ableist) hierarchy and authority and power relations in the workplace (Harlan and Robert, 1998). Harlan and Roberts (1998) explain that these power relations are formalised arrangements of job segregation and methods used within the job analysis that reward only set skills that are likely to be ascribed to jobs occupied by white men. Harlan and Robert (1998) argue that in order to initiate equity of treatment it requires a change in the way organisations do things that include everyday decision-making, social interactions, but also in the way production processes are structured. They advocate that further theory development on organisations and inequality, not only to support the existence of ableism in the contemporary workplace, but how organisations practice disability, and also how and why organisations resist altering their practices. Moreover, they stress that more research is needed to understand organisations’ reactions, in particular with

providing reasonable adjustments in the hiring process. Thus, scholars urge for an inclusion of the concept of ableism in research for and with disabled people, because it can provide new insight into how organisations disable individuals with impairments. This study intends to contribute to this theoretical literature and tries to demonstrate in what way this conceptual tool can be used to better understand why organisational processes are disabling.

Summarising, this thesis takes the concept of ableism and the experience of internalised ableism as a conceptual framework in order to explore to what extent ableist norms have influenced the experiences of individuals with impairments of disability in the labour market and in interaction with organisations. While some studies (e.g. Jammaers et al. 2016) have predominately focused on discourse analysis and the use of language or used secondary analysis of Employment tribunal cases (Foster and Wass, 2013), to identify ableist norms. This study adopts the concept of ableism to analyse the personal experiences of disability shared by disabled people on how they challenged disability inequality embedded within the recruitment process. It takes into account unequal power relations between employer and employee, but views that disabled jobseekers are able to challenge, at least to some extent, ableist organisational practices. Likewise, it explores whether employers are aware that ableist norms are embedded within the design of organisational practices, in particular recruitment processes that can directly, but also indirectly, discriminate against disabled people.

## **Conclusion**

Reflecting on the disability studies literature, this thesis agrees with Oliver's (1996) underlying view that none of the sociological understandings of disability fully explain disability in totality and accepts that the social model is not a social theory of disability or a materialist history of disability, but that it is about personal experience and professional practice. The social model has a clear focus on exposing the economic, environmental and cultural barriers that individuals encounter and who are viewed by others as having some form of impairment – whether it is intellectual, physical or sensory. This view is embedded within our society, which continues to discriminate, oppress and exclude individuals with impairments, and continues to view and label them as disabled people informed by the medical model (Oliver, 1996). As Thomas (1999; 2004a; 2004b) and (Reeve, 2004; 2014) suggested moving the focus of research onto an 'extended social model of disability' (see, Reeve, 2004) by incorporating a social relational understanding of disability, research can reflect back to Finkelstein's original view of disability. This definition acknowledges that social oppression is associated with relationships, at both the macro and micro social scales, between impaired and non-

impaired people. This thesis intends to use the extended social model of disability because it allows for analysing disability at the public and the private level by adding to the theoretical literature of the extended social model of disability, which not only focused on external oppression, but also considers that individuals might face internal oppression. Each story told is therefore unique but can provide a valuable insight into the job search experience of disabled people within the current labour market.

This experience of internal oppression can be linked to the concept of ableism, particular internalised ableism, and can also be used to describe disability discrimination within society. Ableism can explain that there are dominant practices, processes and beliefs of certain social groups and social structures that value and promote certain abilities over others (Wolbring, 2008). Conceptually, the notion of ableism builds on the social model of disability, due to the socially constructed nature of disability (Jammaers et al. 2016). This thesis uses the concept of ableism and the experience of internalised ableism in its analytical framework in order to understand how disabled jobseeker undertake their job searches and applications, despite these preferred taken for granted ableist norms, such as productivity, being embedded within employers hiring practices. It takes into account unequal power relationship between employer and employee, but views that disabled jobseekers are able to challenge, at least to some extent, ableist organisational practices.

Therefore, the first research question that this thesis intends to answer is: How is disability experienced by people with impairments in the labour market and in interaction with organisations? This first question is directed at all participants (jobseekers and employers) within this study to explore in what way disability might be experienced in the labour market and in interaction with organisations. Disability is the experience of structural and psycho-emotional barriers as defined by Reeve (2006). Both dimensions together are referred to as social barriers within this thesis.

This study not only intends to enrich the literature by demonstrating the experiences of disability by jobseekers with visual impairments and learning difficulties, but also to grasp insight into employer's awareness and acknowledgement of disability within the labour market and in the design of their recruitment practices. Social barriers exist because of inequalities within society, due to individual differences, such as disability that disadvantage or restrict people from activity caused by a social organisation that excludes them from the mainstream of social activities, in this case, employment (UPIAS, 1976). These social barriers can be experienced externally in form of imposed restrictions of activity, as currently

recognised by social modelists (e.g. Oliver, 1990), but there are also social barriers, which create 'restrictions' within disabled people, and therefore limit psycho-emotional wellbeing (Thomas, 1999). For instance, by feeling 'hurt' in form of emotional pain, as a result of reactions and behaviours of non-disabled people that make disabled people feel 'worthless' or of lesser value (Thomas, 2004) as workers. The aim has been to provide insights not only into public experiences of disability, but also into the personal experiences of disability, in form of direct and indirect psycho-emotional disablism that can exclude someone from employment as effectively as solely structural disablism, as identified by social modelists.

The focus of this study is not to deal with the restrictions and pain of impairment, but to highlight the social barriers of the labour market and employers' organisational practices that discriminate towards disabled people in obtaining a job. Acknowledging the importance of the social model for disabled people might not be able to analyse or replicate disability in totality, but as Oliver (1996) argues, it can be used to aid our understanding of disability. It will help in emphasising barriers that should be removed with the input and advice of disabled people and their organisations. Thus, the units of this analysis are social barriers and material relations of power that need to be changed. This investigation will take the needs and voices of disabled people and their organisations into account, in order to remove disabling material and social arrangements, which proceed to exist in the current labour market. The next chapter explores how the feminist concepts of the ideal worker and inequality regimes can be used, and have been used, to comprehend how organisations and organisational practices, in particular online recruitment practices, can disable individuals with impairments.

### **Chapter 3: Using the ideal worker norm to identify disabling online recruitment practices**

The previous chapter 2 set up the framework to create access to conceptual spaces to explore the two dimensions of disablism (structural and psycho-emotional) in relation to each other, which are important to understand as these explain how disability is socially constructed and experienced. The level of analysis to investigate the experiences of both structural and psycho-emotional barriers has moved away from solely a macro level scale, which predominately provides insight into the changes of work in capitalist societies and the role of the state and other key institutional actors, and onto a micro level scale. This micro level scale focuses on highlighting that individuals with impairments experience personal experiences of disability because of relations with employers or other actors in the labour market, and the way recruitment practices have been designed. It is these interactions that people have with each other and organisations that need to be understood, because the material spaces for the exclusion and inclusion of disabled people are created in the way that organisations respond to structural barriers. While the organisational and management studies literature is only at the early stages of advancing conceptual tools to fully comprehend this space from a disability perspective, feminist research has already extensively engaged in debates on how processes and practices in organisations exclude women. To contribute to the literature, this chapter begins by showing how the feminist concepts of the ideal worker and inequality regimes have been used and can be used in connection with the concept of ableism, which has emerged in disability studies, to analyse how organisations interact with disabled people.

The concept of the ideal worker, in general a masculine notion, is embedded within society and the labour market, and is formed around gendered norms and 'ideal qualities and behaviour' that a 'disembodied' and 'abstract' worker should have for a given 'abstract' job (Acker, 1990; 2012; Granberg, 2015). Acker (1990) defines that the closest 'disembodied' worker undertaking this 'abstract' job derives to be a real worker, is a man, who is rational, a strong leader, committed to work, and free from family, or other responsibilities, because traditionally women were responsible for unpaid work (Acker, 1990; 2012; Collinson and Hearn, 1996; Williams, 2000; Martin, 2003). In feminist organisational analysis, the position of disabled people has been generally neglected; however, Foster and Wass (2013)

demonstrate that this concept of the disembodied worker that rejects women as ideal worker can also be used to explain the experiences of employees with impairments in organisations. This image of the ideal worker is said to be manifested within inequality regimes (Acker, 2006). Acker (2006; 2009) defines inequality regimes, as loosely connected practices, processes, actions and meanings, which result in and preserve class, gender, and racial inequalities in society. This concept can be adopted as an analytic approach to understand the continuing creation of these inequalities in work organisations (Acker, 1990; 2006). Inequality in organisations is defined as systematic imbalance between individuals in power and control over goals, resources, outcomes or workplace decisions, which include the ways work is organised. Organisations vary in the extent to which these imbalances are present and how oppressive they are (Acker, 2006) but the notion of inequality regimes can be useful to help explain how and why discrimination occurs and is maintained. In previous research by Acker (2006) disability inequality within organisations has been acknowledged, but it is argued here, in line with scholars, such as Harlan and Roberts (1998), Williams and Marvin, (2012), Foster and Wass, (2013), that it has not been given adequate consideration for analysis. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to demonstrate that this analytical approach can be used to understand the ways in which employers disable jobseekers through the recruitment process.

The primary focus of this chapter is to show that the concept of the ideal worker and inequality regimes can be used to understand the ways in which recruitment, as an organising process, results in producing disability inequality. These recruitment practices are built on the basis of ableness, which may discount individuals who are not thought of as 'ideal' because of impairment, and who are perhaps considered to be less competent than able-bodied workers. Thus, the image of the ideal worker in organisations is not only informed by gendered norms, but also by ableist norms that expect a real worker to be able-bodied. This chapter shows how the analytical tools, of the ideal worker and inequality regimes, fit within the overarching approach of this thesis that individuals with impairments are disabled due to social barriers within the labour market, rather than as a result of impairment. This study is positioned within the organisational and management literature that investigates recruitment practices from an equality perspective.

The secondary focus is to investigate literature on the way that online recruitment can produce disability inequality. It shows the increasing use of the Internet as a recruitment channel and the adoption of web-based recruitment tools, and the implications this has for

equality within the labour market in terms of disability (Kuhn and Skuterrud, 2000; Wallace et al. 2000). It outlines the circumstances in which the online recruitment process creates a number of inequality practices, which can disable individuals with impairments during their job searches and applications. This chapter highlights that there is a gap within the literature on inequality barriers with regards to the recruitment process, the experiences of disabled jobseekers, and the impact of new online forms of recruitment for people with impairments.

Lastly, this chapter critically reviews the literature on the legal regime within the UK for disabled people within the employment context. It highlights whether and how equality law and policy can influence recruitment practices and employers' views of disability. The chapter proceeds by outlining the development of the concept of the ideal worker within the sociological study of work to show in what way this concept can be used to understand the production of disability inequality within organisations.

### **Organisational and management studies, and the ideal worker norm**

The aim of this section is to highlight how the concept of the ideal worker has been understood as embedded within organisational practices and organisations and how it can be used within an analysis of ableism. This ideal worker norm is said to be unconsciously embedded as a model used within approaches to job design and organisations, influenced by F.W. Taylor (1911) and scientific management, and is taken for granted when analysing the 'one best way of working', without consideration of workers needs or behaviour (Ash, 1988; Rose, 1988). In his book *Industrial behaviour*, Michael Rose (1988) made an early attempt to demonstrate that there exists a model of the 'typical' worker in every core of theory of industrial behaviour. He questioned Taylor's techniques to study job design by arguing that when a sample of participants is based on workers who are already more productive than other workers, the findings are not applicable to the whole workforce and therefore displace some individuals. Rose (1988) criticises his taken for granted understanding of a worker and implies that in reality, there is not just 'one best way of working', but there could be several best ways of working when individual differences of workers are taken into consideration for analysis.

This criticism has also been adopted within organisational and management studies. Scholars (Smith, 1989; Clegg and Dunkerley, 1977, 1980 Knights et al. 1985) have argued that approaches to job design and organisations adopt a positivist theory. that views organisations and workers as machines with the attempt to increase their productivity and efficiency

without acknowledging the impact of individual differences. Research has been informed by Taylor's engineering techniques, such as observation or experimentation, to discover certain constant and regular features in organisations in order to achieve the optimal performance of labour (Smith, 1989; Clegg and Dunkerley, 1977, 1980; Burrell, and Morgan, 1979 Hales, 2001). These scholars urge that more critical approaches to organisation studies are a better way to analyse job design, because they acknowledge that individual difference and social needs impact upon work behaviour, but the priority is to show how dominant ideas or perceptions are embedded within organisations (Clegg and Dunkerley, 2013).

Feminist scholars criticised (see, Mills and Tancred, 1992; Acker, 1990; Wolff, 1988) that the traditional view of how organisations operate was based on the fundamental principle that most workers in the public sphere were male. For example, research on higher levels of management and professional workers on the most part concentrated on men, because men dominated positions of power and leadership. Even in the praised Hawthorne studies (see, Mayor, 1949) informed by a human relations school, which established a clear collaboration between management and labour, research failed to acknowledge the gender of workers (Acker and Van Houten, 1992). This indicates that organisational theory and research has been produced by men for men and used men as subjects and objects of study (Goldthorpe et al. 1968; Hearn and Morgan, 1990; Jsherrif and Campbell, 1992; Ely and Meyerson, 2000). A number of scholars have indicated that these traditional organisational studies have unconsciously disregarded that their understanding of a worker is based on the model of the ideal worker (Acker, 1990; Collinson and Hearn, 1996; Williams, 2000; Martin, 2003). As such, it can be argued that approaches to job design and organisations are specifically gendered, because they only reflect the work behaviour of men. Research in this areas has often ignored the position of women and other social groups, but also the impact of structural and ideological assumptions within society that are embedded within organisations – the gender inequality regimes to which Acker refers in her work.

Within feminist literature, gender has been defined as the patterned, socially constructed difference between female and male, feminine and masculine (Acker, 1992). Gender is not 'natural' or given but is socially constructed and performed daily in the process of taking part in work organisations and also in many other settings and relations in society of producing and constructing social structures (Acker, 1992). Scholars have argued that these social practices in general tend to reflect and advocate men's experience and life situations, because they are predominately created by men for men (Acker, 1990; Martin, 1996; West and



Zimmerman, 1987; Ely and Meyerson, 2000). These social practices appear to be gender neutral, because they have been embedded as the necessity of organisational life. However, these practices that include formal policies and processes, but also informal patterns of every social relations, preserve a gender order in which particular forms of masculinity are performed (Ely, and Meyerson, 2000). Thus, organisations are a particular place inevitably connected to the production of gender relations and gender is embedded in the essential on-going process of producing and constructing social structures (Acker, 1990). The underlying gender substructure, unquestioned norms that distinguish between masculinity and femininity (Maier, 1999), is produced everyday within organisational practices and activities, underpinning the organisational logic, the administrative process responsible for outlining task processes (Acker, 1990). In the organisational logic, both jobs and hierarchies are abstract categories, which have no inhabitant, human body nor gender (Acker, 1990). However, to transform this abstract job into a real element, the employer needs a disembodied worker, whom exists only for the work. Under capitalism, this closest, disembodied, ideal worker is a male worker, who is able to take full-time work, whereas women are responsible for the household and childcare (Acker, 1990). It was expected that women workers had legitimate responsibilities beyond those essential to the job and they therefore did not fit with the abstract job (Acker, 1990). Thus, the organisational structures (which consist of organisational practices directed to achieve organisational targets) are not gender neutral, because abstract jobs and hierarchies assume a gender neutral, abstract, worker (Acker, 1990; 2012). This shows that many approaches to job design and organisation are flawed, because they only represent the behaviour of the 'ideal worker', which is socially constructed as a man.

Adopting this view, Foster and Wass (2013) demonstrate that the concept of the disembodied worker that rejects women's bodies as ideal workers can also be used to explain the experiences of employees with impairments and the devaluing of their skills and abilities in comparison to ableist expectations. They explain that whenever a worker is in need of a reasonable adjustment (a change to the working environment) in order to perform a job, this alteration to the standardised ableist norm will unavoidably lead to a clash with the established organisational logic. Linking back to chapter 2, scholars have argued that job positions are largely designed around the ideal, non-disabled, workers who are considered able to perform tasks in the most efficient way to extract the highest rate of profit (Harlan and Roberts, 1998; Foster and Wass, 2013). Oliver (1990) for example, noted that capitalism had an impact on the development of work methods to the detriment of those with

impairments, in the way it standardised job tasks or the way it has adopted new technology within the production process. These were designed for disembodied workers, such that they, and not people with impairments, were able to perform them in the most efficient way to extract the highest rate of profit. These changes in the organisation of work and the commodification of labour anticipated the formation of the ableist norm, and disabled people were finding it hard to sell their labour power (Gleeson, 1999). Capitalist social relations not only rejected impaired labour, but also denied accepting responsibility for any illnesses that were caused to workers because of over-working or the lack of health and safety (Abberley, 2002). Thus, it can be argued that organisations are built on the basis of ableness, and practices and processes intrinsically exclude individuals who are not perceived as having the socially accepted body to be able to undertake any productive work (Harlan and Roberts, 1998).

This section demonstrates that these aforementioned feminist insights are important to shed light on how current approaches to job design and organisations are gendered. The concept of the ideal worker and inequality regimes present a way to look behind apparently neutral processes and practices to analyse how these produce unequal social relations in organisations. In line with the notion of ableism, these concepts can be applied to understand how organisational mind-sets and practices are disabling. The following section shows that disability scholars have recognised that these feminist approaches to study organisations have potential to theorise disability in organisations and demonstrates in what way this thesis contributes to the theory by redesigning these concepts.

### **Inequality regimes: disability as inequality dimension**

This section begins by arguing that organisational practices lead to the construction of inequalities (here these inequality processes are referred to together as ‘inequality regimes’) within organisations based on social relations of gender, race, and also disability that have been neglected (Acker, 2006). It highlights how Acker (1990) has acknowledged the production of disability inequality within her idea of inequality regimes that she defines as an analytical tool (see, Acker, 2006), but she has not yet incorporated this dimension into her work. This tool has the potential to demonstrate how a number of practices within the recruitment process are arranged to disable people with impairments. This section therefore shows how Acker’s analytical tool of inequality regimes can help identify how ableist processes within society are embedded within organisational processes that produce disability inequality. The segment concludes that ableist norms (similar to gender norms)

have structured the nature of work and remain to do so because they are deeply embedded within practices, policies and the organisational culture. As Chapter 2 explored, ableist norms are a reflection of attitudes of certain social groups and social structures that value and promote certain abilities, such as competitiveness or productivity (Wolbring, 2009), that an individual has to meet the physical standards set by dominant (non-disabled) group in society (Harpur, 2009). It is also important to reflect on the 'double bind of ableism' (Campbell, 2009), that organisations might promote 'inclusion' and have positive attitudes towards the recruitment of disabled people, however there are a number of processes that connect in complex ways to maintain disability in organisations.

Within feminist literature, Acker (2006) developed the concept of inequality regimes to highlight the way that organisations are gendered. This concept has been used as an analytical approach to understand the construction of inequalities in organisations, which are linked to inequalities in the surrounding society, its history, politics and culture. Her analysis was influenced by the concept of intersectionality, which considers the way that multiple axes of inequality (such as, race or gender) intersect. This concept was first adopted by Crenshaw (1989) to analyse the employment experience of black women in the USA. Crenshaw's study highlighted that black women can have an intersection of social identities (e.g. gender and race), which can thus lead to multiple forms of discrimination. Studies have adopted this analysis to consider how different forms of inequality should not be considered in separate analytical spaces (McCall, 2005; Handcock, 2007; McBride et al. 2014) because these forms of oppression interrelate and construct a system of oppression that replicates the intersection of multiple forms of inequality. Acker (2012) explains that the idea of inequality regimes is only one approach of many and involves the analysis of processes concurrently embedding gender, race and class imageries and expectations in on-going practical activities that organise work (organising processes). While the tool can be used to explain specific organisations at specific historical moments, she adds that considered decisions can be made to center research merely on certain facets of inequality regimes to answer particular questions.

Acker (2006) proposes that inequality regimes within organisations have different components. An analysis should therefore focus on investigating these six components (as identified by Acker) and how they operate in a particular case. These are: (1) the basis of inequality, (2) the shape and degree of inequality, (3) organising processes (on-going practical activities that organise work) that create and recreate inequalities, (4) the invisibility of inequalities, (5) the legitimacy of inequalities, and (6) the control that prevent protests against inequalities. While Acker acknowledges that change is difficult and change efforts might fail,

she maintains that these inequality regimes can be challenged. She proposes that change projects have to rely on combined change efforts from outside the organisations, such as social movements and legislative support, as well as, active support efforts within organisations to challenge inequality regimes (Acker, 2006).

A number of scholars have contributed to the work of Acker and her frameworks such as, the concept of intersectionality (Tali and Özbilgin, 2012), organisational logic (Parson et al. 2012; Kelly, 2012), gender-subtext (Benschop and Doorewaard, 2012), and of gendering organisational processes (Sayce, 2012). As it stands, there are only a few qualitative studies, which have already adopted this conceptual framework of inequality regimes within their research. For example, Healy et al. (2011) used it to explore the experiences of Bangladeshi, Caribbean and Pakistani women in public sector organisations, whereas Koivunen et al (2015) undertook a study to investigate informal practices of gender, age or race inequality in recruitment in Finland. Moreover, Berry and Bell (2012) adopted this theoretical lens to explore and explain gender, class, and race stereotyping in home health work in the US. These scholars focused predominately on explaining the intersection of age, class, race or gender inequalities in organisations, but Berry and Bell (2012) acknowledged the importance of including other dimensions in further research, such as disability. Thus, research shows that the concept of inequality regimes has great potential to shed light on the invisibility nature of discriminatory practices and processes in organisations. It can be used to explore how a number of sometimes apparently neutral practices in the recruitment process can produce disability inequality.

While Acker (2006) has recognised physical disability or age, these dimensions were not central within the idea of ‘inequality regimes’ as an analytical approach, because of the belief that these forms of inequality are not embedded in the structure of organisations. However, the study of ableism provides insight into how disability is manifested in the structure of organisations and formal social practices, such as organisational policies or processes, but also informal patterns of everyday social relations can also produce disability inequality (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). This thesis suggests that disability as a dimension within Acker’s analysis of inequality regimes could be defined as a socially constructed difference based on psychological and physical characteristics, culture, and historical domination and oppression. From this view, disability is not ‘natural’ or given, but like gender, it is socially constructed and performed daily in processes and practices in organisations and also in many other settings and social relations in society (Acker, 1992). Society and its institutions view and treat people with impairments differently compared to people without impairments precisely

because of social expectations relating to the body. Based on the social model of disability, see Chapter 2, individuals with impairments are disabled due to the social barriers that are built on ableism that takes little or no account of people who have physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments. These social relations that form disability (experiences of structural and psycho-emotional disablism) are embedded in social practices that act to preserve or challenge 'ableist normativity' as discussed in Chapter 2 (Campbell, 2009).

A growing number of management scholars have argued for an inclusion of disability as an inequality dimension within approaches to job design and organisations (Harlan and Roberts, 1998; Williams and Marvin, 2012; Foster and Wass, 2013). Foster and Wass (2013), for example, highlight that in comparison to disability scholars, feminists have been more content to explore the embodied character of work, which has been responsible for concealing and reproducing gendered relations within organisations (Hochschild, 1983; Acker, 1990). As noted in Chapter 2, the social model was criticised by a number of scholars from within disability studies for interpreting the body as invisible, therefore research ignored to explore the embodied character of work. However, more recently Thomas (2004) has offered an alternative concept, psycho-emotional disablism, as discussed in chapter 2, which has been able to reconcile impairment within the social model of disability. It recognises that social barriers (such as prejudice and stigma) can place real obstacles in front of individuals with impairments, in areas such as employment, which are critical to material wellbeing and civil status (Thomas, 2004). Foster and Wass (2013: 711) contend that psycho-emotional disablism can be found within organisations claiming that non-disabled people, often unintentionally, though sometimes intentionally, are offensive to those with impairments through actions, words, symbols and images. By acknowledging psycho-emotional disablism, they say, research can identify that there is an individual dimension of oppression or impact of disabling practices and processes, which is a consequence of social or organisational barriers, without abandoning the predominant approach of the social model and its importance for disability studies.

Using Ackers' analytical tool of inequality regimes can help demonstrate that these social practices that form disability within society are also evident within organisations, and that some organisational practices – in particular here a number of practices that are part of the recruitment process – can lead to disability inequality. Disability inequality in organisations is defined as systematic imbalance between disabled individuals and non-disabled individuals in power and control over goals, resources, outcomes or workplace decisions, which include the ways work is organised.

The next section outlines the contribution of combining the concept of ideal worker and inequality regimes as an analytical tool and of a way to think about how recruitment practices, which are designed around taken for granted ableist norms, may disable individuals with impairments. Using the concept of the ideal worker can be a starting point for analysis, rather than the endpoint and can be used to demonstrate that recruitment as an organising process (of inequality regimes) produces disability inequality.

### **Ableist norms embedded within the recruitment process**

This part of this chapter begins by reviewing the recruitment literature and shows how the thinking of this literature was predominately informed by the psychometric approach to recruitment. The chapter argues that recruitment processes are influenced by a psychometric and an equality of treatment approach to equality and that these are not 'neutral' or 'fair' as claimed. This literature has adopted a distinct view of the recruitment process and what is considered as inequalities. These perspectives are incomplete because they fail to capture that jobs themselves and practices to find a person to match the job are not abstract or neutral as claimed. Within the literature scholars acknowledge that recruitment and selection are practices that discriminate against candidates based on relevant and fair criteria like attitudes or technical skills, rather than irrelevant criteria such as age or disability. However, it has been argued that since these practices adopt a 'one best way' assumption, unfair discrimination or prejudice because of irrelevant criteria occur during this process (Newell, 2005).

This section draws on feminist critiques of the recruitment process to demonstrate how concepts of ideal worker and inequality regimes can be used and have been used to open up new insights of the literature relating to recruitment (Acker and Van Houten, 1974). Critical approaches to study organisation have predominately focused on highlighting gender or race inequality within recruitment (see, Acker, 1990; Acker and Van Houten, 1974; Huffcutt and Roth, 1998; Holgate and McKay, 2006; Åslund and Nordström Skans, 2012). Scholars indicated that the recruitment process as experienced by specifically women or ethnic minorities is not objective as claimed, but embedded within a set of assumptions about what constitutes work, who workers are and how the functions of labour operate and are informed by a gendered set of societal norms. Thus, assumptions about who will be recruited are based on the notion of an ideal worker. These studies can give insight into how the recruitment process may result in disability inequality. This thesis positions itself within the literature that investigates how recruitment as an organising process may result in disability inequality from an equality perspective (Stevens, 2002; Unger, 2002; Vedeler et al. 2014). The first part of

this section criticises traditional approaches to recruitment, because practices are built on the concept of person-job fit, which views jobs as abstract and ability as being neutral. To date, only one paper by Foster and Wass (2013) has indicated how traditional approaches of the job design are informed by the ideal worker norm, which has suggested that these norms are also embedded within the recruitment process – from the job analysis to the recruitment practices adopted - and may lead to inequality.

Thus, this thesis argues that competency approaches to recruitment are viewed as gendered, and should also be viewed as ableist, because competencies used to identify a fit are based on ideal worker norms. Likewise, this section reviews the concept of person-organisation fit within more contemporary recruitment approaches and indicates the impact of organisational culture on recruitment practices. This chapter sets out the conceptual tools that have been used to criticise theoretical assumptions underpinning the recruitment literature especially those that assume that the process can be objective or neutral and that equality can be achieved when treating everyone the same.

Within the human resource management (HRM) literature, there are many definitions of recruitment and selection (R&S) (Searle, 2009), however all are concerned with an arrangement of different practices, which can be divided into four stages: first, defining the job role, second, the attraction of job candidates, third, managing of the applications, sifting and selection process, and lastly, the appointment of the new worker (see, Hendry, 1995). In fact, the job description predominately constitutes as the basis for recruitment advertisements of job opportunities and the ways by which the information is shared. Thus, the job description has indeed an impact on the degree of attraction of the recruitment advertisement and how it is perceived by potential candidates and can therefore lead to implications of the success for recruiting and selecting prospective workers (León García-Izquierdo et al. 2015).

Recruitment and selection are often treated as one term, but there are clear differences (Orlitzky, 2008; Searle, 2009). For some scholars, such as Searle (2003; 2009) recruitment concentrates on practices that identify and choose individuals from a group of job candidates external to the employers, whereas selection prioritises on internal candidates. For others, recruitment includes the identification, attraction and ends when a candidate has applied for the position (Armstrong, 2009; Downing et al. 2013).

For the purpose of this chapter, recruitment is said to be the process of attracting individuals who might meet the job specification and who then submit a job application, whereas

selection is the process that measures the differences between applicants to find the ‘best’ person that matches the person specification as specified by the job profile or description (Newell, 2005). This implies that there can be wrong people for a job, who might be a liability rather than an asset for the success of an organisation (Newell, 2005). A job is seen as an objective, neutral entity that can be identified and is distinct from the individual that can be found to ‘fit’ the job (Acker, 1990).

The theoretical focus of debates of scholars doing research on recruitment and selection practices has been predominately around distinct paradigms, the psychometric person – job fit approach, the competency approach, the social process approach and person-organisation fit. Seale (2009) argues that only if scholars understand these different perspectives, they can respond to questions around the gap between research and practice. Therefore, the following section analyses each approach, and identifies in line with other scholars, which predominant thinking underpins the recruitment process, in what way the concept of the ideal worker can be used to challenge the assumptions that underpins this predominant thinking and how the concept of ableism is able to demonstrate in what way this thinking is disabling for individuals with impairments.

### **Psychometric approach ‘person-job fit’**

Traditional job analysis practices and methods were widely influenced by Taylor’s (1911) scientific management, in that he divided up jobs in its parts and assigned it to multiple workers, and scientific methods were then used to define the one best way of working (Ash, 1988). Stewart and Carson (1997) explained that these principles were adopted to rationally match people to technically defined jobs. In Taylor’s approach it was essential that organisations consisted of positions to be filled (not workers). Consequently, jobs could therefore be theorised, evaluated, defined and considered as significant entities that exists independent from individuals, who either met (job holder) or who may meet (applicant) the requirements, of a particular position (Stewart and Carson, 1997). Approaches to recruitment and selection therefore adopted this scientific view of jobs and the notion of the best way of doing a job.

The concept of person-job (P-J) fit is embedded within R&S practices in that it is the authority of the organisation to objectively assess the fit between workers and the type of work and skills they need in order to analyse their job performance or work attitudes (O’Reilly, 1977; Caldwell and O’Reilly, 1990; Searle, 2009). This concept of fit has long been



used to demonstrate that both an individual's personality or needs and specific job tasks are able to predict future work performance and it informs the design of traditional R&S practices (Caldwell and O-Reilly, 1990). Searle (2009) indicates that three criteria are central for this paradigm. (1) Individual difference, in that jobseekers have apparent and stable differences. (2) Jobs, are performed only in the one best way and can be objectively captured. (3) Organisations and their agents are rational in their decision-making.

Traditional approaches to R&S therefore adopted the use of formalised methods that have sound psychometric properties of validity and reliability (including job description, psychometric tests, assessment centres and structured interviews) that claim to be able to predict the 'right' person and reject the 'wrong' one for the job (Newell, 2005). This psychometric approach is the predominant approach in HR practice and is underpinned by the good practice model of recruitment and selection. Within this paradigm the jobseeker has a more passive role to provide employers with data by undertaking tests and tools to assess their knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics, in other words their suitability (Searle, 2009).

Over time, these traditional, psychometric, approaches to recruitment and selection have faced wide-ranging criticism from scholars in that there is inconsistency between the prescriptions in the literature and in actual practice (Billsberry, 2007; Searle, 2009). One criticism challenged the assumption that jobs are abstract or gender neutral (Foster and Wass, 2013; Acker, 1990). For example, within Acker's (1990) work on inequality in organisations, as mentioned above, she acknowledged that the organisational logic sheds light into apparently neutral categories used in the job evaluation. These neutral categories of the job or the worker to fill it are gendered, or as Foster and Wass (2013) pointed out, reflect the beliefs and interests of certain groups of people in society, which are predominately white, able-bodied men. In the opinion of Foster and Wass (2013), individuals with impairments are generally not viewed as ideal workers, when jobs are designed around these able-bodied norms. The concept of ableism can be used to shed light on the way that these ideal worker norms are embedded within the design of the recruitment process and practices that inevitably select out those individuals who are not viewed as suitable for the job.

The second criticism of traditional approaches to R&S comes from equality scholars who have argued that formalised practices underpinned by equal treatment approach to equality are not by definition 'fair' (Jewson and Mason, 1986). These apparently neutral and objective practices that have proven to have less adverse (unfavourable) impact on the selection

outcome and greater validity, might conceal implicit bias (Windolf, 1986; Jenkins, 1982; 1986; Jewson and Mason, 1986; Cockburn, 1989; Dickens, 1994; Kandola, 1995; Newell, 2005; Byrson et al. 2013). These scholars challenge the objectivity of traditional recruitment and selection practices, which include approaches to the design of the job description, the use of selection tools such as psychometric tests and structured job interviews, because practices are based on measures that claim to be able to predict a person-job fit. However, these apparently neutral measures are designed around ableist norms embedded within the recruitment process. Within R&S, which is supposedly designed to be fair and objective, human emotion and bias plays a role in the operation of these practices, but this has often become invisible (see, Jewson and Mason, 1986).

Scholars have argued that R&S practices might not be 'fair' because subjective judgement and informal norms may lead to biased and unfair R&S decisions (Jenkins, 1982; 1986; Jewson and Mason, 1986; Webb and Liff, 1988). For example, Jenkins (1986) identifies in his study on racism and recruitment that there are two distinctive selection criteria used within the recruitment process. Criteria of suitability, these are highly job specific and are likely to be more explicit (overt), they tend to be listed in a person specification, for instance, under qualifications. By contrast, criteria of acceptability refer to informal attitudes which are unwritten criteria. These are more likely to be implicit (covert) and are unspecified, such as gut feeling of recruiters towards a job candidate (Jenkins, 1986). As such, he argues acceptability criteria can lead to race inequality whenever standards are set, which are not justifiable and that an individual with an ascribed characteristic is less able to meet, such as prior work experience or educational qualifications.

However, other academics questioned Jenkins' analysis of selection criteria, because measures of suitability are never straightforward in R&S practices. In fact, Webb and Liff (1988) who draw on feminist critiques argue that suitability criteria are embedded with dispensable criteria of acceptability chosen by organisations and implies whether the applicant should be male or female. The job analysis therefore includes subjective value judgements of essential skills and working practices that result in the job being gendered, these skills and working practices are then established as indicators of suitability. Regardless of whether women demonstrate their skills, experience or qualifications for a specific job role, they are still often categorised as unsuitable because of their gender (Webb and Liff, 1988; Acker, 1990). While both studies by Jenkins (1986) and Webb and Liff (1988) indicate that recruitment and selection practices lead to race and gender inequality, there has also been a growing body of research that has begun to emphasise that indicators of suitability

are also based on the concept of ableism (Foster and Wass, 2012; Jammaers et al. 2016). These studies indicate that disabled people are seen as unsuitable for jobs, because they are implicitly considered less able and less productive compared to non-disabled people. Foster and Wass (2012) draw explicitly on the notion of the ideal worker to explain that these productivist assumptions are manifest within R&S practices. Similarly, Koivunen et al. (2015) highlight that implicit criteria are often socially shared ideas about the ideal worker that differs in organisations and societal contexts (Tienari et al. 2002). Social divisions, such as race, gender, but also disability, inform these ideas. Koivunen et al. (2015) contend that these ideas about the ideal worker can have a significant - although often unintended - effect on recruitment and selection practices and produce inequalities in organisations. These critical perspectives on the recruitment process demonstrate how apparently neutral and objective practices adopted by employers intentionally or unintentionally overlook that the ideal worker norm can have an impact on the design of these R&S practices in organisations. Consequently, when organisations assume that by adopting these 'neutral' and 'objective' recruitment tools it can minimise the risk of inequality, they inevitably ignore that the ideal worker norm is deeply embedded within the design of these organisational practices.

### **Competency approach**

Within the HR literature, psychometric approaches to R&S have been challenged by an alternative approach to the job analysis, the competency approach to R&S. This competency approach adopted by organisation tries to identify a series of effective individual behaviours that will increase organisational performance (Boam and Sparrow, 1992; Newell, 2005). Some scholars (see, Herriott, 1992; 1993; Illes, 1998; Billsberry, 2007) also refer to it as a social process paradigm, that assumes that a job is a changing set of role expectations and relationships, and work behaviour is part of a process, which includes the social relations, and perceptions of their outcomes. Compared to traditional job analysis, which focus on analysing work processes and the skills needed to perform them, competency approaches focus on what the individual has to do, to be effective in their job (Lawler, 1994). This competency approach sets greater emphasis on motivation, flexibility, teamwork orientation or other related characteristics of prospective workers that is fundamental for the job performance (Siddique, 2004). Thus, this approach identifies competencies (behavioural indicators, such as interpersonal skills, self-motivation) needed to perform the job well, rather than fixates on personal qualities, such as assertiveness (Dessler, 2003; French and Rumbles, 2010).

It has been argued that the competency approach would be able to confront the fact that subjective judgements are made based on personal qualities, which are associated with work performance, however it did not offer an alternative to how staff are selected to the psychometric approach (Newell, 2005; Billsberry, 2007; French and Rumbles, 2010). Thus, scholars have also questioned this approach to R&S, because competencies are not abstract or neutral. Research in this field has argued that competencies are socially constructed and not as predicted by some scholars as objective and quasi-scientific (Townley, 1999; Garavan and McGuire, 2001; Finch-Lee et al. 2005). This has been seen in the case of Reese and Garnsey (2003) who found that competencies used by organisations mirrored and reinforced male and gendered behaviour, leading to implications for gender equality. Their findings demonstrate that the ideal worker norm is also embedded within the competency tools used within this approach to R&S. This process is still an interpretation process that requires subjective judgement of the particular behaviour essential for the job and the recognition of traits, attitudes, skills and abilities (Newell, 2005). Similarly, research has shown that preferred behaviour and competencies of the ideal worker also impacts on employers' recruitment practices concerning disabled people (Stevens, 2002; Unger, 2002; Foster and Wass, 2013). Recent studies (Foster and Wass, 2013; Jammaers et al. 2016) indicate that individuals may experience disability when jobs are structurally based on the competencies of the ideal worker.

### **Social process approach**

An alternative to the psychometric approach is what Herriot (1987) terms social process approach. Herriot (2002) explains that the social process perspective is complementary to the classic psychometric approach, one sided decision making of the organisation, because it adds to the literature by accounting for certain outcomes of the selection process. For instance, why some jobseekers exit the process or refuse to accept a job offer. Searle (2009) adds that this paradigm focuses particularly on the social interaction between both parties, the jobseeker and the recruiting organisation. Thus, the jobseeker becomes an active negotiator and also co-constructer of recruitment and selection activities. The key focus is on developing a relationship between the applicant and the organisation by fostering an encouraging environment in which mutual trust is reinforced. Originally this social process perspective was underpinned by a number of social psychological constructs (Herriot, 2002). For instance, the focus was on the human rights of jobseekers (see, Wolf and van den Bosch, 1984) whereas Herriot's (1989) research was informed by the concept of psychological

contract, role, power and self-efficiency. However, the social process perspective lacks evidence to support it. Moreover, Searle (2009) argues that this approach is mainly adopted in more senior level roles, where the organisation is searching for a candidate who has a specific skill set and approaches are designed to at best, mesh and potentially improve the delivery of the job role. While this paradigm does not challenge the way that employers select their employees, Ryan et al. (2000) argue it does encourage research to have a fresh look at the pre-entry process and provides a conceptual tool to understand that recruitment is not one-sided, but an interactive process. This process begins to view jobseekers as already having made up an opinion of an organisation when they apply for jobs, rather than these being shaped only by the selection process. In fact, Reeve and Schultz (2004) argue that jobseekers hold pre-existing perceptions of the assessment accuracy of different types of selection processes before they have even gone through the process. Scholars within this area of recruitment have started to acknowledge the relevance of the perspectives that jobseekers bring to the recruitment process, not only their perspectives within the recruitment process. This provides an opportunity to use the extended social model of disability approach to bring further insights into this debate since it acknowledges that social relations with past employers and colleagues and engagement with the recruitment process can impact on whether job applicants intentionally but also unintentionally exit the recruitment process.

### **Person-organisation fit**

More recently, there has been a shift in the nature of work and the basis of the organisational structure, and organisations have adopted a R&S approach that is based on the multidimensionality of these processes - person-organisation (P-O) fit (Herriott and Anderson, 1997; Graham, 1976; Searle, 2009; Edwards and Billsberry, 2010). While traditional R&S practices assume a 'fit' between personal characteristics of the individual and the technical demands to fill a defined job (P-J fit) (O'Reilly, 1977; Caldwell and O'Reilly, 1990), these selection methods focus on identifying a 'fit' by matching an individual and their surroundings with the values, goals and mission of an organisation (P-O) fit (Mischel, 1968; Schneider, 1987; Lauver and Kristof-Brown, 2001).

This concept of person-organisation fit is based on the idea that individuals are attracted to organisations that have a similar value system, where new arrivals socialise and adapt in the organisation and others who do not fit into the organisational culture tend to leave (Schneider, 1987). Within organisational studies, a culture has been generally defined as a set of perceptions shared by members of a social unit (Smirch, 1983), and elements of this

culture include assumptions, values, expectations, or behavioural norms (Rousseau, 1980). Dimensions of P-O fit include 'internal' factors, such as personality, values or competencies, and 'external' factors such as job requirements, organisational culture or expected behaviour (Edwards and Billsberry, 2010). Similar to the social interaction perspective, this approach demonstrates that there is a balance between the individual and the organisation, with the aim of achieving a positive fit (Searle, 2009). However, methods of this organisational culture analysis to identify a fit between the person and the organisational characteristics, do inevitably lead to inequality in R&S practices. In particular, when characteristics of the organisation are based on norms and assumptions, which inevitably reject personal characteristics, such as gender or disability (Acker, 1990; Smith, 1994). For example, Ball (2005) identified in his study that many organisational cultures seem to take for granted that the workforce is able-bodied. He suggests that this could present barriers to the recruitment or retention of disabled people. Consequently, approaches to R&S that focus on a P-O fit are more likely to lead to disability inequality when cultural norms and assumptions are based on the concept of the ideal worker.

### **Responding to current challenges**

In recent years, scholars, such as Bryson et al. (2013), that undertake research on recruitment and selection have begun to criticise the underlying notion of supply and demand that underpin the recruitment process, because the matching of employment to jobseekers is understood as a market mechanism. By adopting this viewpoint, they have acknowledged the social nature of the recruitment process. Empirical studies in the UK and worldwide, such as Felstead et al. (2007), demonstrate that skills at aggregate level are in over-supply or workers hold a higher qualification than they need to either to do their present job or to sustain it. Bryson et al. (2013) elaborate that this indicates that the traditional model of R&S to match the person to the job is not being undertaken well by employers. Within the labour market there has been a rise in post-compulsory education however this has not been met by an equivalent expansion in real demand for skills, with the result that supply has exceeded demand. Livingstone (2010) suggests that employers often respond to these changes by progressively 'raising the bar' in terms of qualification requirements even for quite mundane jobs. This change however can be seen to further exclude individuals from the labour market that might have the skills to undertake the jobs but are hindered to apply for them because of the increased level of skills required. Byron et al. (2013: 143) argue that one should view recruitment and selection not as a technocratic process, but rather as a societal perspective,

‘as the point to which a number of forces and interests are bargained over and power relationships are established’. Viewing recruitment from this societal perspective provides scope to use the concept of ableism as conceptual tool to show in what way ableist norms of the ideal worker influence the design of recruitment practices and the power relationships established between the individual and the recruiting organisation during this process, and in what way these can be disabling for individuals with impairments.

This section has identified the conceptual tools that can help to understand how recruitment and selection practices might lead to, and create, inequality. The concept of the ideal worker can be used to explore the ways in which seemingly neutral and objective processes can be disabling. Traditional and competency approaches to recruitment are designed based on the P-J fit, which has been influenced by ableist norms and consequently tend to reject individuals who might be able to do the job, but who do not fit with the embedded criteria of the ideal worker. Likewise, contemporary approaches to recruitment that add organisational characteristics into the fit concept also ignore taken for granted gendered and ableist norms. Evidence on race and gender inequality suggests that recruitment practices are designed around gendered and ableist norms that can create a mismatch between the formal job description and the applicant. Likewise, this embedded concept of the ideal worker also rejects disabled jobseekers that do not meet these expectations of ‘ideal qualities and behaviour’, leading to disability inequality within R&S practices. The newer debates within the recruitment literature have opened up space to explore recruitment as a social or relational process, rather than technocratic process, and that the interactions between the organisation and jobseekers during this process have to be further understood to provide insight into the way power relationships are established and ableist recruitment practices are built. The section below indicates that this concept of the ideal worker can also be used to show that the design and use of attraction tools has taken other ableist norms for granted that can disable individuals with impairments during their job searches and applications online.

### **Online recruitment as an organising process**

This section highlights current trends within the HR literature, which suggest that most organisations have relocated the attraction stage of the recruitment process to the Internet and initiated the use of web-based tools in R&S practices due to labour market shortages and recruitment difficulties (Dineen et al. 2002; Anderson, 2003; Parry and Tyson, 2008; Thompson et al. 2008). It has been argued by scholars such as Lievens et al. (2002) that

organisations have moved their focus from selection towards the attraction of potential employees. Thus, this attraction stage, that traditionally involved a number of tools such as job advertisements or paper-based application forms and has now been predominately replaced by Internet recruitment, is seen as vital in order to attract a pool of potential candidates for the advertised vacancies (Searle, 2009). While the benefits and challenges of online recruitment practices for the organisation have been widely investigated, research on the negative impact for jobseekers is fairly absent. This section shows that there is a gap within the R&S literature that views online recruitment from a societal perspective (Byron et al. 2013), as a social process (Searle, 2009) and in what way these recruitment practices can disable individuals with impairments, because they are built around ideal worker norms. Moreover, it also highlights that there has been recognition that these practices might have an impact on disabled people (see, Barber, 2006), but there has been little research, which investigates the experiences of disabled jobseekers with this online form of recruitment and their engagement with these practices during job searches and applications.

A growing number of jobs are now advertised on the Internet (see, CIPD, 2017), changing the way jobseekers look for jobs, but likewise opening new possibilities for employers to find their 'best talent' (Cappelli, 2008). Previous studies have widely advocated the advantages of web-based recruitment tools for both the hiring organisation and prospective employees (Galanaki, 2002; Chapman and Webster, 2003; Parrry and Tyson, 2008; Parry and Wilson, 2009; Maurer and Cook, 2010; Lee, 2011). For instance, Chapman and Webster (2003) identified in their study in the US a number of benefits for the organisation when adopting online recruitment. These advantages include the shortening of the hiring cycles, reducing costs to increase applicant pools, and standardising their selection systems.

In fact, there is little known about the reactions of job applicants to web-based recruitment practices (Dineen et al. 2002; Anderson, 2003; Thompson et al. 2008) from an equality perspective. Indeed, only a few studies highlight the impact of race or gender inequality and online job searches (Kuhn and Skuterrud, 2000; Wallace et al. 2000), or the inaccessibility of online job boards or e-recruitment websites for disabled people as a structural barrier (Erickson, 2002; Corrigan, 2008; Lazar et al. 2012). Yet no research exists that concentrates on investigating the experiences and responses of disabled jobseekers in interaction with organisations and this new online form of recruitment as a social process by adopting the extended social model of disability and the concept of ableism as conceptual framework.



Thus, there has been limited research on the negative impact of relocating R&S practices to the Internet (Maurer and Cook, 2010; Cappelli, 2001), and employers awareness of the social barriers this form of recruitment can impose for disabled people.

Within research, the expressions of Internet recruitment or online recruitment that refer to the formal sourcing of job information on the Internet were first mentioned in the mid-1980s (see, Casper, 1985), while methodical references to online recruitment is found almost a decade later (Galanaki, 2002). More recently, it has also been referred to as e-recruitment (Lee, 2011). Compared to traditional R&S methods the critical aspect of the online recruitment process is now the attraction phase (see, Cappelli, 2001; Barber, 2006) with the use of the Internet as a medium, which adopts a variety of electronic means and technologies with the main goal of identifying, attracting, and selecting potential employees (Chapman and Webster, 2003). This online recruitment process now also includes the use of online pre-screening (pre-selection) tools, such as self-administered tests or questionnaires to filter out suitable candidates (Barber, 2006). Barber (2006) explains that the use of these screening tools is used to guarantee that candidates that do not satisfy pre-conditions or give incorrect answers are immediately screened out of the application process.

While the numbers of studies of online recruitment have been growing steadily (Galanaki, 2002), most organisations still rely on a combination of both traditional psychometric or competency tools in line with online solutions in their recruitment practices (Callaghan and Tompson, 2002; Chapman and Webster, 2003; Newell, 2005; CIPD, 2009; 2015 Zibarras and Woods, 2010). Thus, the online recruitment literature emphasises the technocratic nature of recruitment, rather than captures it as a social or relational process. This increasing use of technology within UK organisations and their R&S practices is exemplified in a more recent survey by the Chartered Institute for Personnel Development (CIPD) in 2017 (involving the participation of over 1000 HR professionals from public, private and voluntary organisations), although the adaptation has not been as fast as projected. Organisations view corporate websites among the most effective attraction methods (74 %), followed by professional networking sites (60 %) and job boards (58 %), whereas competency-based interviews (78 %) and interviews following contents of CV/application form (74 %) remain the most used selection method (CIPD, 2017).

One of the earlier scholars within e-recruitment, Cappelli (2001) emphasises that the attraction phase is essential to attract potential employees, and employers make use of job adverts on corporate websites in-house or the use of job boards or recruitment agencies for

their recruitment activities externally (Hogler et al. 1998). These websites are now the first place where jobseekers look for jobs and evaluate a possible P-O fit with potential future employers (Cappelli, 2001). Yet, Hogler et al. (1998) raises an important issue that employers might intentionally or unintentionally overlook when adopting online recruitment, which is that technology itself might select against certain groups of workers, such as ethnic minorities, women or older workers, because individuals have unequal access to the Internet (Civille, 1995; Hoffman and Novak, 1998). This concept referred to as the 'digital divide' has emerged within the literature, which explains the gap between people in society who already have access to ICTs, such as the Internet or assistive technology, and those who have no access or lack the appropriate skills to use these technologies (Hoffman and Novak, 1998; Cullen, 2003; Selwyn, 2004; Eurostat, 2016). Similar to unequal Internet access for ethnic minorities or women, empirical evidence of European and US data shows that disabled people are the group that is most affected by the digital divide (Adam and Kreps, 2006; Dobransky and Hargittai, 2006; Vincent and Lopez, 2010; LFS, 2015; Eurostat, 2016; Abscal, 2016; Scholz et al. 2017). While the Internet creates new potentials and possibilities for empowerment and self-advocacy for disabled people (Trevisan, 2017; Seale, 2007; Seymour and Lupton, 2004), and research shows that the use of speech software or the adoption of easy read formats can make web pages more accessible (Evelt and Brown's study, 2005), access to the Internet and the design of online spaces can also be disabling, and some argue that the Internet has evolved as a 'disabling environment' (Easton, 2013).

Even though, governments have pushed for the adoption of accessibility standards to the virtual world, the concept of accessibility takes for granted socio-economic contexts. For example, the availability of accessible infrastructure or computer training at public places (Lewthwaite, 2014; Abscal et al. 2016), but also socio-relational factors, such as age, educational attainment or financing, which can have an impact on access to the Internet for disabled people (Easton, 2013; Scholz et al. 2017). The likelihood of using web-based tools in R&S could therefore have an adverse impact on disabled people. Thus, disabled jobseekers that do not have access or cannot afford technology, because of socio-economic, technological (Vincente and Lopez, 2010), cultural or political barriers (Selwyn, 2004) might face social barriers during their job searches. Yet, most studies within the academic literature that investigate the link between social group characteristics and the online job search, have focused on black people and Hispanics (see, Kuhn and Skuterrud, 2000) and only one qualitative study in the US has investigated the structural barriers that disabled users might face with job application websites in this debate (Lazar et al. 2012). Thus, research has not

yet explored how both structural and psycho-emotional disablism interact and can impact on disabled jobseekers when they engage with the online recruitment process and their job searches and applications online, leaving a gap within the literature that this thesis intends to fill.

Moreover, Chapman and Webster (2003) suggest that while eliminating or reducing the human element from selection practices might reduce or remove adverse impacts of bias towards protected groups, technologies, such as screening software, it might have a contradictory impact on individuals during the recruitment process. For instance, Roever and McGaughey (1997) demonstrate that traditionally a CV had to be attractive to the human eye, however today it has to be attractive to the eyes of the computer, therefore scannable. This study shows that there are a number of processes that operate and indirectly shape how pre-selection decisions are undertaken. Thus, jobseekers have to anticipate keywords (buzzwords or jargon) that the scanning software might use to match the individual application with the programmed set of words for the job position (Schullery et al. 2009). However, for some disabled jobseekers (and others) that might not be as literate and are unfamiliar with these keywords; this could be a barrier to application (Stalker and Terpinier, 2008). Thus, automated software might inevitably screen out potential workers, because their application does not flag up as a match with keywords on the person specification, and thus leading to inequalities (Acker, 1990; Cappelli, 2001; Schullery et al. 2009). Correspondingly, Barber (2006) points out that online recruitment becomes more of a 'processing factory' and employers lose the 'personal touch' with jobseekers, which might discourage some individuals from applying for jobs, but also exclude others, who might face technical difficulties due to the inaccessibility of these processes.

Having discussed how exclusion of disabled people can arise with the adoption of online tools in the hiring process, Cappelli (2001) also argues that outsourcing R&S activities to recruitment agencies, referred to as intermediaries within the literature (see, Granovetter, 1974; 1995), can intensify these risks, if they make use of personal information, such as disability, during the recruitment process. While the use of agencies in recruitment is not a new approach to recruitment used by employers, more recent research has shown that job boards and recruitment websites have been less likely to be accessible for disabled people (Erickson, 2002; Corrigan, 2008; Lazar et al. 2012). These studies raise the question that if organisations used job boards or websites that are not designed in an accessible way; they might impose a barrier for disabled people when they apply for jobs within the organisation. The CIPD (2017) shows that UK organisations (from 28 % in 2013 towards 44 % in 2017)

increasingly use the combination of in-house and outsourcing approaches, whereas in the public sector (60 %) or in the non-profit sector (75 %) most recruitment activities are still only in-house. This suggests that there is another level of complexity in the recruitment process. Recruitment is not only an organising process within a particular organisation, but some recruitment practices are undertaken by external organisations that might also produce inequalities. Therefore, the recruitment process exists of a number of processes that work together. The concept of inequality regimes can be helpful to add to the understanding that the recruitment process exists of a number of inequality practices that produce disability inequality (Acker, 2006).

From the above, the literature indicates that the move towards web-based recruitment is potentially creating new social barriers for disabled jobseekers, but there is little qualitative research to show that online recruitment process has had this effect. The literature suggests that within the recruitment process there exist a number of reinforcing practices, which as a whole create potential barriers for disabled jobseekers. The recruitment literature has shown that scholars predominately view online recruitment as technocratic process, rather than as a social process. By doing so, they assume that online recruitment practices are fair and neutral entities. This leaves a gap within the recruitment literature to explore the interactions that disabled jobseekers have with this online recruitment process and to investigate whether employers are aware that these practices can be disabling.

Thus, the next section critically reviews the literature on the legal regime for disabled people within the UK and highlights how recent legal developments in equality law and policy can influence recruitment practices and employers' view of disability.

### **The regulation of the recruitment process**

The recruitment literature above demonstrates that employers' methods used in the recruitment process are shaped by the approach to regulation of the recruitment process and is predominantly informed by an equal treatment approach to equality adopted within the legislation. The technocratic approach maintained in the design of recruitment practices underlines employers' compliance to the legal regime. Though, a review of the assumptions that underpin this legal regime illustrate that there are key tensions and shortcomings of the law in advancing equality for disabled people. The central arguments of this section criticise the Equality Act 2010 and the predominant equal treatment approach to equality adopted. While the legal framework offers some positive action provisions in regard to disabled

people, these are only permissive rather than mandatory for employers. Even though the law offers more proactive approaches, such as the duty to provide reasonable adjustments, these are also informed by the overarching equal treatment approach and can lead to tension between organisations and disabled people.

This section critically analyses the Equality Act 2010, which includes prior provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA), that presents a legal framework ‘to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all’ (EHRC, 2017). First, it gives an overview of the Equality Act 2010 and how these different legal tools can be used in the employment context. Second, it highlights that disability within the Equality Act 2010 still refers to the medical model of disability, which has been criticised by disabled people and the disabled people’s movement, as discussed in Chapter 2. Then, it explains that the reactive duty to make reasonable adjustments might not be effective to challenge ableist norms and leaves many loopholes for employers. Fourth, it demonstrates that the Equality act permits certain exemptions, which allow employers to ask pre-employment health questions in their R&S practices. Lastly, it shows that the law encourages positive action initiatives to support the employment of disabled people. However, evidence demonstrates that these initiatives might only be ‘empty shells’ (Hoque and Noon, 2004).

### **The Equality Act 2010**

In the UK, the first anti-discrimination legislation that protected disabled people from discrimination in employment was implemented in 1995, the Disability Discrimination Act, because of the growing disabled people’s movement. The DDA gave disabled people a statutory right to challenge unjustified discrimination that they encountered on grounds of their disability in the workplace (Barnes et al. 1999). In 2010, the implementation of the Equality Act 2010 amended and combined pre-existing anti-discrimination provisions in the UK into one overarching piece of legislation (Easton, 2011). In line with the Equality Act 2006, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) (2011), a non-departmental public body that combined the independent bodies (such as, Disability Rights Commission and Commission for Racial Equality) into one (GOV, 2006). The EHRC is mandated by the UK Parliament to challenge discrimination, and to protect and promote human rights (Wadhams et al. 2010). It is an additional body that exists alongside previously established government-funded advice bodies, such as Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) and financial support available to employers through financial schemes such as

Access to Work (further discussed below) (Hoque and Noon, 2004; Fevre et al., 2011; Foster and Wass, 2013).

Under the Equality Act, there are a variety of measures to protect individuals (job applicants or workers) from discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics by employers (s.39) (Oliver, 2016). It is not permitted to discriminate against a person in the arrangements that an employer makes for deciding to whom to offer employment, (S. (39) (a)), in regards to the terms of employment offered (S. (39) (b)), and by not offering employment (S. (39) (c)). A person is only protected under the Equality Act when they have a protected characteristic, such as disability, which is informed by the medical model of disability. The act states that a person has a disability, if they have a physical or mental impairment and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities (s.6). This medical definition has been criticised by many scholars is explored further in the section below. The Act acknowledges that discrimination towards individuals who have a protected characteristic can take different forms. Direct discrimination (s.13), indirect discrimination, which was not included under the DDA (s.19) and harassment (s.26). Moreover, the Act also includes a specific form of prohibited conduct that prohibits 'discrimination arising from disability' (s.15), except when an employer can justify this treatment.

In addition, the Equality Act contained a new provision that specifically addresses recruitment which was not integrated in the DDA (s.60) that prohibits discrimination in recruitment. It is designed to prevent employers from asking jobseekers about any health-related issues before any selection decision is made. It is open to certain exemptions and does not apply if an employer wants to establish whether an applicant can undergo the assessment and whether they have a duty to make reasonable adjustments (s.60(6)(a)) or to determine whether the candidate will be able to carry out a function that is intrinsic to the work concerned (s.60(6)(b)). A violation of this section can only be enforced by the EHRC (s.60). However, when candidates can establish facets from which it can be recognised that they have faced direct or indirect discrimination, the burden of proof will be reversed, and it will be the employer to demonstrate that they did not discriminate against a candidate (s.60(4-5)) (Hepple, 2008; Oliver, 2016). There is only little research on this provision, as discussed later in this section (see Adams et al., 2013). The underpinning assumption of this section is based around an equal treatment approach to recruitment. Health and disability should not be seen as relevant criteria that is used in a selection decision and employers should therefore not be informed about these irrelevant criteria to avoid that discrimination

might take place (Newell, 2005). However, this provision fails to consider the proactive measures of the law that acknowledges that organisational practices are designed around ableist norms, and some individuals have to ask for reasonable adjustments to make the recruitment process accessible (Foster and Wass, 2013; Jammaers et al., 2016). Thus, this provision is designed around the view that recruitment is a technocratic process which adopts 'fair' and 'neutral' practices, rather than a social process, in which power relationships between the jobseeker and the recruiting organisation are established (Searle, 2009; Byron et al. 2013).

Lastly, the Equality Act also includes some measures that promote a more proactive response to prevent barriers encountered by disabled people, the duty to provide reasonable adjustments and positive action. The duty to provide reasonable adjustments (s. 20), which applies to employers under s.39 (5). The Act imposes the duty to make reasonable adjustments where a disabled person is put at a substantial disadvantage compared to a person who is not disabled in regards to three requirements. First, a provision, criterion and practice (s.20(3)), second, a physical feature (s.20(4)) and third, the absence of auxiliary aid (s.20(5)). The first and third requirements relate to the provision of information and an employer has to take steps to ensure that in the circumstances concerned the information is provided in an accessible format. The duty is limited to an 'interested disabled person' under schedule 8 (s.5(1)), in that a person, an applicant or a worker has to notify the employer that they are or may be an applicant for the employment. This means that this duty is reactive in nature and only applies if a candidate has identified as a disabled person and requests an adjustment in relation to their needs (Lawson, 2011).

Moreover, the act permits positive action by employers in general (s.158) and in regards to recruitment and promotion (s.159) to overcome the underrepresentation those sharing that protected characteristic (not exclusively disability), to meet the different needs of a group, or overcome a disadvantage (Oliver, 2016). While positive discrimination by recruiting or promoting a jobseeker solely because of a protected characteristic is unlawful under the Equality Act, for instance the use of quotas, positive action to treat an applicant with a protected characteristic more favourably in recruitment or promotion than someone who without the characteristics is permitted in certain circumstances (Waddington, 2015). However, adopting these proactive measures rely on an employer's goodwill and self-enforcement. In relation to recruitment, the employer can to adopt a 'tie-breaker', where they select a candidate on the basis of a protected characteristic, where the candidates are equally qualified (Oliver, 2016). This selection is only permitted where an employer can show that

they want to overcome or minimise a disadvantage or underrepresentation of a particular group (Oliver, 2016). When adopting these measures, the employer is protected from anti-discrimination claims by individuals who do not have the protected characteristic.

It is argued by Oliver (2017) that employers are able to go beyond these limited proactive mechanisms in relation to disability, because compared to other protected characteristics, such as gender or age covered by the 2010 Act, disability anti-discrimination law addressing direct discrimination differs, because it is asymmetrical and not symmetrical nature (s.13 (3)) (Waddington, 2015). It is a one-sided protection, which means that it only protects disabled people, not non-disabled people, from direct discrimination on the grounds of disability (Waddington, 2015). Thus, it is not unlawful to treat a disabled person more favourably than a non-disabled person by initiating positive action and by providing reasonable adjustments (EHRC, 2017). While this concept of difference has been central to the equality law, previous research has shown that employers and managers have only inadequately understood it to foster an inclusive working environment (Woodhams and Danieli, 2000; Foster, 2007; Foster and Fosh, 2010; Foster and Wass, 2013). These studies show that employer's assumptions, ideas and behaviour can have an impact on whether and how these proactive measures are implemented in organisations.

### **The medical model of disability definition**

The paragraph above has pointed out a number of tensions within the legal regime. One particular concern is the individualised approach of the definition of disability that the legal regime has adopted. The technocratic recruitment literature advocates that recruitment practices should be designed in compliance with the legal regime. Consequently, employers adopt this medicalised view of disability as the norm, which has maintained the negative view of disabled people and their abilities in the labour market and in society.

Within the literature, there are a number of well-documented critiques of the UK's equality laws (Gooding, 1996; Barnes, 2000; Goss et al. 2000; Wells, 2003; Wadhams, 2010; Lawson, 2011; Easton, 2011; Foster and Wass, 2013). Firstly, the DDA was criticised by Barnes (2000) for using the medical model of disability as its underlying basis (see, Chapter 2), which limits the scope to which disability discrimination can be addressed within the wider social structures of work and society. This medical model has been retained in the current Equality Act (2010), see above (s.6). This definition looks at the attribute as an 'impairment', on what is 'wrong' with individuals with impairments and focuses on what they are unable to do,



rather than seeing the response to that attribute as the problem (Barnes, 2000; Wells, 2003; Lawson, 2011; Solanke, 2017). This view is said to have shaped organisational practices, because they are designed around taken for granted ableist norms that disable individuals with impairments (Acker, 2006; Foster and Wass, 2013). Consequently, UK employers that rely on this definition in their recruitment practices might inadvertently encourage disability discrimination, by focusing on a person's deficit.

In line with other scholars (see, Barnes, 2000; Wells, 2003), Lawson (2011) urges a change of the definition of disability in the Equality Act and argues that it is possible to move away from this medical focus. She gives the example of Article 1 of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), to which the UK is bound, and which contains no definition of disability, only a purpose clause, which is the lens through which each article is to be read (Connell, 2017). It states that:

‘Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (CRPD, 2006: 3).’

This definition as Lawson (2011) indicates uses the word ‘may’, which suggests that an actual restriction of participation in society is not fundamental. Thus, it recognises that any disability might result from the impairment ‘in interaction’ with social barriers, while the Equality Act insists that a disability results entirely from impairment. She contends that using this definition would set the Equality Act 2010 free from its unaccommodating structure and instead concentrate on the social dimensions of exclusion and disadvantage within society and the workplace. This would have implications for the recruitment process, and employers would have to re-evaluate the design of their recruitment practices and in what way these disable individuals with impairments from obtaining a job and not a person's disability. Within the literature, there has been a debate around the limited nature of the legal regime and the exclusion of systematic aspects of existing social arrangements or social exclusion as part of an alternative justification for equality laws (see, Collins, 2003; Fineman, 2008). More recently, Solanke (2017) promotes a fundamental reconstruction of the whole regime of anti-discrimination law to prevent and protect individuals from discrimination by tackling social, as well as interpersonal and institutional acts of discrimination. Her starting point is not an individual characteristic but the cross-cutting concept of stigma. As discussed in Chapter 2, stigma is considered to be the source of all discrimination by creating an anti-stigma principle

that emphasises the social sphere and power. This anti-stigma principle is said to be parallel to the social model of disability understanding, in that the problem of discrimination lies not in the attribute, but is the consequence of structures, practices, and attitudes that hinder a person to exercise their abilities (Wells, 2003). She advocates that the anti-stigma principle therefore takes the social model as its norm for anti-discrimination law, which can help inform a reconstruction of anti-discrimination law. This law would refer to ‘stigmatised characteristics’ rather than ‘protected characteristics’, in order to correct the vision of anti-discrimination law by acknowledging that both social practices and individual behaviour can be discriminatory. She explains that by accepting this anti-stigma principle the law can move from a ‘quasi-biological’ to a ‘socio-relational’ basis, which means that:

‘It takes social interaction as the starting point instead of immutability and individual attributes alone. In so doing, it steps beyond identity to address - as demanded by intersectionality - interlocking systems of oppression’ (Solanke, 2017: 212).

Thus, Solanke (2017) explains that this would move the focus of discrimination from the attribute of individuals, towards the structures, practices and attitudes that hinder the person from exercising his or her abilities in society.

### **The duty to provide reasonable adjustments**

Secondly, there is another major debate within the equality literature around the duty to make reasonable adjustments first adopted in the DDA (Easton, 2011; Lawson, 2011; Foster, 2007; Woodhams and Corby, 2003; Wells, 2003; Stevens, 2002; Jackson et al. 2000). This duty to provide reasonable adjustments extends to the recruitment process, however the debates within the disability studies or disability law literature predominately concentrate on the duty to make reasonable adjustments in the selection process or once a disabled person has been employed (see, Foster, 2007; Stevens, 2002; Jackson et al. 2000). These debates are restricted to niche areas of disability literature, rather than within the recruitment literature.

Scholars have widely criticised the reactive and responsive nature of this duty (s.20) within the employment context (Woodhams and Corby, 2003; Wells, 2003; Lawson, 2011), because the employers’ duty to make reasonable adjustments is limited to ‘an interested disabled person’ (s.5 (1)). Thus, it works on an individual basis and only arises when the employer is made aware that a jobseeker or worker in question is disabled and exposed to a ‘substantial disadvantage’ (Lawson, 2011). According to Wells (2003) the duty is not absolute and is subject to the requirement that the adjustment does not place a ‘disproportionate burden’ on

the employer. She argues that this view neglects to point out any potential gains of a barrier free workplace and disabled people to the organisation. Thus, Wells (2003) suggests that the duty concentrates on the polar opposition of individual gain (access to employment) versus employers cost, which is not useful in tackling social or systematic forms of disability discrimination, because it strengthens the perception that the principle result of providing reasonable adjustments for disabled people is expenditure and not benefit.

Legal scholars have criticised the design of the legal regime from a social model perspective, whereas the disability studies literature has engaged in empirical studies to investigate the application in practice. Research has shown that the implementation of the UK governments' scheme called Access to Work has been weak. The aim of this scheme was to support employers financially and practically with their duty to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace (Barnes et al. 1999). While the Sayce Report in 2011 underlined the importance of the scheme and that it was able to help some individuals gain or stay in employment, evidence suggests that this scheme lacks publicity, and disabled people or employers are unaware of its existence (Sayce, 2011). Thus, scholars widely argue that this scheme has failed to challenge the underlying view embedded in the duty to make reasonable adjustments in that employing disabled people is costly (Lunt and Thornton, 1994; Barnes et al. 1999; Sayce, 2011). For instance, Barnes et al. (1999) criticise that subsidies or financial incentives to employers for employing disabled individuals only reaffirms that they are less capable than non-disabled workers. Indeed, Lunt and Thornton (1994) explain that these approaches to policy focus solely on the deficit of the disabled individual and neglect to address social barriers (structural and psycho-emotional disablism) faced by disabled people within the labour market and in interaction with organisations. Thus, the idea behind this scheme is to cover costs associated with the disabled person rather than to challenge the inaccessible design of the workplace. There is a gap within the disability literature that is concerned with analysing the role of the state in encouraging employers to actively engage with their legal duty to provide reasonable adjustments. This opens up the debate for further empirical research to investigate the role of the state in promoting the employment of disabled people and in what way the legal regime has failed to address it.

Adding to this debate, Foster and Wass (2013) point out that while the duty can serve to challenge the match between a worker and a given job description, it was built on the assumption that employers would be prepared to recognise matters that can disable individuals with impairment in organisations. Their study however suggests that employers

might be aware that physical features need to be changed to make the working environment more inclusive. However, they are less amendable to make changes to the job design, that conflict with the dominant 'organisational logic' (Foster and Wass, 2013). They agree with Williams-Whitt and Taras' (2010) argument that employers should not just fit a disabled person into a job that has been designed for someone who is not disabled but should engage in a genuine attempt to fit the job to the individual and their requirements. However, when linking back to the legal debates, the duty to provide reasonable adjustments is too constrained to allow such changes, because employers only have to make alterations to the working environment that are 'reasonable to make'. Foster and Wass (2013) add that in theory this duty could challenge disability inequality in the employment context. However, in practice the success of this equality intervention is dependent on adequate independent expertise from outside the organisation, for instance the EHRC, but also trade unions (Foster and Fosh, 2010; Hoque and Bacon, 2014). These bodies could help monitor the compliance under the Act and help challenge the individual perceptions of disability and advice managers or employers on ways to 'diffuse the disruptive power relations' that develop when employees or jobseekers try to exercise their right to request reasonable adjustments (Foster and Wass, 2013).

Lawson (2011) notes that while the Equality Act 2010 provided an opportunity to reconcile and adjust previous reasonable adjustment duties, most innovations were made in the non-employment context. Thus, service providers, providing goods, services or facilities to the public (and that includes information services) have to monitor their services or functions and to anticipate (foresee) any disadvantage that might have been caused to disabled people by practices or provisions, criteria, by physical feature or by the absence of an auxiliary aid or service provision (s.20) (Lawson, 2011; EHRC, 2014). The strength of this provision is that in an anticipation of a disabled person accessing a service the 'provider is under a duty to provide a service as close as reasonably possible to the standard normally offered to the public at large' (Easton, 2011: 25). This duty is relevant to the recruitment process, for example, in what way the jobcentre offers employment support or where the library provides Internet access to the public. Easton (2011) explains that the Act has failed to state that websites are also covered by the duty to provide information in an accessible format under section 20 (6). However, she suggests that with the rise of ICTs over the years, this 'neutral' language of the provision can be used to apply to both current and future uses of ICTs to communicate information (Easton, 2011). This would imply that the duty also applies to the design of public job boards, such as Universal Jobmatch run by the Jobcentre.

Thus, it can be argued that this anticipatory duty would be also appropriate to be adopted within the employment context (Lawson, 2011). It has the potential that employers would have to adopt proactive measures, which requires that they anticipate any disadvantage that might have been caused by the number of practices adopted in the recruitment process. This would include the use of designing online application processes and recruitment websites that are inclusive and accessible, but also adopting measures to monitor external recruitment practices undertaken recruitment agencies or job boards used. Up to now there has been no research undertaken to explore whether employers are aware that ableist norms underpin the design of online recruitment practices, which can lead to experiences of discrimination for disabled jobseekers when they engage with the online recruitment process. This thesis intends to rectify this gap and supports Lawson's (2011) argument, that a change to an anticipatory duty would help disabled people to have better protection from disability discrimination in particular during the recruitment process, because employers have to foresee any social barriers that disabled jobseekers might face during their searches for jobs and when individuals submit their online application.

### **Preventing employers from asking about a person's health**

In order to prohibit discrimination in recruitment the 2010 Act contains section 60, as mentioned above. Lawson (2011) explains that although health is wider than disability, it does include disability. The rationale behind adopting this provision has been to remove any disproportionate disadvantage that disabled jobseekers might face due to pre-employment health questions and to challenge rejections made at the early stage of the recruitment process (EHRC, 2011). However, Lawson (2011) argues that the range of exemptions for employers under this section limits the extent and outcome of this section. Lawson (2011) suggests that those employers who are not willing to abandon pre-employment health enquiries will most likely rely on the exemption, which is to establish whether the applicant is able (with the help of reasonable adjustments) to undertake the function intrinsic to the work (s60(6)(b)). Thus, the effectiveness of this section is dependent on judicial understanding of the 'functions intrinsic to the job' exception (Lawson, 2011). Within the equality literature there has only been limited research on whether section 60 has had an impact on the employment situation in the UK labour market. Up to day, only one study by Adams et al. (2013) investigated this provision and showed that employers lacked general understanding around pre-employment health questions. The study (including 400 small-to-medium size employers) found that around one in twenty employers (6%) had asked the job applicants a health-related question

without giving any reason. Correspondingly, the study gave evidence from the perspective of job applicants. Half (of 506 with and 502 without impairments) said they were asked if they had a disability or health condition at one point during the recruitment process (online and written application forms or interview). Findings suggest that employers are more likely to ask further questions when the job candidate has declared their condition or illness voluntarily. These would include questions about the impact of the impairment on the particular job (33% with impairments vs. 17% without impairments) or whether reasonable adjustments had to be made to the workplace (33% vs. 13%). The indications of this study suggest that employer's still lack awareness and full comprehension of the pre-employment provisions of the Equality Act 2010. The absence of research raises the need for further research on section 60 of the Act to fully demonstrate whether and how disabled jobseekers are still penalised when they disclose their disability.

### **Positive Action**

Lastly, as noted earlier, the Equality Act 2010 permits for positive action measures in recruitment under s.159. However, Oliver (2017) suggests that theoretically direct discrimination under section 13 of the Act allows for a practice where employers can treat disabled people more favourably without having to meet all the criteria of s.159. It is a one-sided protection. This means that it protects the employer from anti-discrimination claims by individuals who do not have the protected characteristic. This favourable treatment is evident in voluntary codes of practices such as the Positive About Disabled People Two Tick symbol launched in 1990. By adopting this scheme, the government has tried to encourage employers to improve their recruitment practices and to recognise that there is a business case for employing disabled individuals in that valuing individual differences can improve the overall working environment and organisational outcomes (see, Dibben et al. 2002). Jobcentre Plus awards it to employers who have made five organisational commitments to value disabled employees (Hoque et al. 2014). These are: to interview disabled jobseekers who meet the minimum criteria for the job position, to provide training opportunities, to help individuals stay in employment when they become disabled, to make sure that every employee is trained on disability awareness to make these commitments work and to annually monitor the progress of these commitments (Dibben et al. 2002; Hoque and Noon, 2014). However, a major criticism comes from Hoque et al. (2014) who stress that while the initiative has the potential to promote the employment of disabled people; it relies on an employer's goodwill and self-enforcement to adopt inclusive practices. Evidence within their

study demonstrates that there was only limited adherence to the five Two Ticks commitments, both in public and private sectors, which as they argue has shown that the symbol constituted little more than ‘empty shells’ (Hoque and Noon, 2004). This evidence suggests that organisations might only adopt the Two-Tick symbol in order to increase their public image; however, in practice it does not remove inequality in their organisational practices. Thus, it is argued that voluntary measures promoted by the UK government that encourage employers to adopt more proactive recruitment strategies might not be appropriate to the objective of changing ableist norms at the organisational level and further mandatory measures of the state are required to support effective change (Dibben et al. 2002; Kirton and Greene, 2016). From the above one can comprehend that the equality law, such as the Equality Act 2010 has the potential to remove disability inequality within the employment context (Lawson, 2011). The Equality Act 2010 has introduced many much-needed changes, such as the anticipatory duty of reasonable adjustments to service providers, of a fairly minor nature, into equality law. Yet, numerous studies have widely criticised the definition of disability used within the law and the reactive duty to provide reasonable adjustments. It places emphasis on what is wrong with individuals with impairments and what they are unable to do, rather than challenging ableist norms and inequality regimes within the workplace and the wider labour market (Acker, 1990; 2006; Barnes, 2000; Wells, 2003; Lawson, 2011; Foster and Wass, 2013; Solanke, 2017). Thus, scholars urge that an effort is made to recognise that any such barriers might be the result from the impairment ‘in interaction’ with social barriers. Likewise, it is advocated that only change efforts at the organisational level might not be able to challenge ableist norms, and outside efforts by the UK government are required to challenge disability inequality in the wider labour market and society.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter highlights how the concept of ideal worker has influenced previous approaches to job design and organisations in a way in that the ‘productive group’ has been used as a taken for granted norm against to evaluate ‘the one best way of working’ (Rose, 1988). In line with emerging critical management and disability research (Harlan and Roberts, 1998; Williams and Marvin, 2012; Foster and Wass, 2013) this chapter shows that incorporating disability as analytical dimension within Acker’s inequality regime can help identify that recruitment practices lead to disability inequality. Scholars have widely criticised traditional psychometric and formalised R&S practices that focus on a fit between the person and the

job, and also more contemporary approaches to recruitment that estimate a fit between the person and the organisation. In general, these approaches to R&S were informed by the use of apparently objective and scientific methods that identified work behaviour in order to indicate a fit between the person and the job and/or the organisation. The recruitment literature has intentionally overlooked the social and relational aspects of recruitment, because it has been characterised by many as being a technocratic process. Debates have started to develop within the recruitment literature that recognise that recruitment is a social process. Thus, research should focus on exploring the social interaction in the recruitment process between both parties, the jobseeker and the recruiting organisation, and the approach taken by employers when they design their online recruitment practices. This debate opens up the space for a contribution that aims to analyse the recruitment process from a critical perspective. This chapter has shown that feminist scholars have designed conceptual tools of the ideal worker and inequality regimes to support such an analysis. Additionally, it has demonstrated that concepts, see Chapter 2, which emerged from disability studies, can be used to develop such an analysis from a disability perspective. Compared to studies on race or gender, the literature has not taken into account the ways in which recruitment practices can also result in disability inequality within organisations. This thesis intends to rectify this gap by viewing online recruitment as a social process where a number of motives and interests are bargained over, and power relationships between the jobseeker and the employer are established. These underpin to what extent recruitment practices are designed around ableist norms that disable individuals with impairments.

Even though the recruitment literature has begun to recognise the perspectives of jobseekers and to understand recruitment as a social process, the literature on online recruitment practices has only sparingly incorporated these perspectives. The growing literature on online recruitment practices has ignored to take into account that the use of the Internet might lead to further exclusion of disabled people from the labour market. This chapter shows that there is a gap within the HR literature on the awareness of employers of social barriers with regards to the online recruitment process, as well as research that investigates the experiences of disabled jobseekers and this new online form of recruitment and selection. The literature indicates that the move towards web-based recruitment is potentially creating new social barriers for disabled jobseekers, but there is little research to show that the online recruitment process has had this effect. Thus, this thesis tries to answer the second research question of how do disabled people engage in online recruitment and processes during their job searches and applications. This question focuses on understanding the experiences that disabled



people have with online recruitment practices and whether they have faced any social barriers to access the Internet for job searches and applications.

Lastly, this chapter has critically analysed the potential of equality law and policy and how it can influence the design of recruitment practices and employers' views of disability. Within the literature, the definition of disability used has been widely criticised, because it still focuses on the medical model of disability. Thus, when UK employers rely on this definition they might inevitable encourage disability inequality within organisational practices, because it centres on what the individual is unable to do, rather than challenges inequality regimes within the organisations. Further debates argue that the legal regime should include that social barriers are also responsible for producing disability. Scholars have begun to reconceptualise the anti-discrimination law on how it can protect individuals from social, as well as interpersonal and institutionalised acts of discrimination by taking the social model of disability as its underpinning norm (Lawson, 2011; Solanke, 2017).

Likewise, scholars have widely criticised the reactive and responsive nature of this duty within the employment context (Woodhams and Corby, 2003; Wells, 2003; Lawson, 2011), because the employers' duty to make reasonable adjustments is limited to 'an interested disabled person'. However, incorporating the proactive nature of the non-employment context (that currently applies only for service providers) could strengthen it. The focus on the disability studies literature and disability law literature and their criticism of the duty to provide reasonable adjustments has been widely in the selection process and within the employment context, rather than in the recruitment process. This thesis tries to investigate the experiences of disabled people when they apply for jobs online and the social barriers that they might encounter when they engage with the online recruitment process, which has been overlooked within the literature.

Moreover, this chapter shows that there is a gap within the equality literature on section 60 within the Equality Act 2010. There exists only one study and it shows a lack of awareness and full comprehension of the pre-employment provisions of the Equality Act 2010 (Adams et al. (2013). Whether or not disabled jobseekers are still penalised when disclosing their impairment after the implementation of this provision in 2010 is uncertain. The lack of research within this area highlights an important gap in the equality literature and calls for further analysis. This thesis intends to rectify this gap within the literature on whether this section 60, which was implemented in line with an equal treatment approach to recruitment, has been able to challenge that unconscious bias or stigma towards disabled people influence

the recruitment process. This legal tool requires that employers treat every jobseeker equal regardless of their personal characteristics, however at the same time it ignores that disabled people might need differential treatment due to structural barriers, in particular when recruitment practices are inaccessible. Thus, jobseekers might have to disclose a disability to receive reasonable adjustments, which for them is a necessity to access the recruitment process. This disclosure might lead to disability inequality.

Thus, this leads to the third and fourth research question, which highlights the importance of investigating online recruitment practices adopted by UK employers and explores ways to challenge these organising processes that produce disability inequality in organisations.

3. To what extent do employers consider the impact of social barriers to the recruitment of disabled people via the Internet?
4. How can disability inequality, embedded within recruitment processes, be challenged?

To conclude, this chapter has identified that there is a gap within the literature on viewing recruitment as a social and relational process where power relations between disabled jobseekers and employers are established. Research has lacked to acknowledge that perspectives and past experiences that disabled jobseeker bring to the recruitment process can impact on individuals' engagement with online recruitment practices. This thesis intends to fill this gap by using feminist conceptual tools of the ideal worker and inequality regimes and disability studies concepts of ableism and the extended social model of disability to explore how a number of practices within the online recruitment process are arranged to disable people with impairments. The next chapter provides details of the conceptualisation of the research design and the methodology adopted for this study.

## **Chapter 4: Disability inequality and the recruitment process: research methodology**

This chapter sets out the ontology, epistemology and methods adopted for this study. A key objective of this thesis is to highlight that disability inequality within online recruitment processes has been ignored, and that there is a gap within the research focusing on an equality perspective, which this thesis hopes to rectify. This chapter begins with a discussion of the overarching ontological and epistemological assumptions and the methodological considerations associated with adopting an emancipatory approach to qualitative disability research. It then considers the qualitative research design, the methods adopted for this study, the importance of reflexivity within the research process and the challenges associated with the role of the non-disabled researcher in disability research. Next, it addresses the formulation of the research questions and the ethical considerations in gaining access to research participants. Lastly, it discusses the data analysis that followed the completion of the fieldwork. The study also explains my commitment to social justice by adopting an emancipatory approach to disability research, which has shaped the research design, methodology and research methods adopted.

To reiterate, the research questions for this study are:

1. How is disability experienced by people with impairments in the labour market and in interaction with organisations?
2. How do disabled people engage with online recruitment processes and practices, during their job searches and applications?
3. To what extent do employers consider the impact of social barriers to the recruitment of disabled people on the Internet?
4. How can disability inequality, embedded within recruitment processes, be challenged?

### **Ontological and epistemological assumptions**

This study is informed by the social model of disability and explores how social barriers can impact on the job search experience of disabled people. It investigates how online recruitment and selection practices create disability inequality, particularly by using the concept of the ideal worker to explore organisational practices. For example, when recruitment practices are designed based on ableist norms that do not take disability into account. Scholars within management and organisation studies have argued that it is vital to acknowledge one's own assumption about the nature of social reality and what it means to

be human (ontology) and also the nature and purpose of knowledge (epistemology) before choosing an appropriate research method to study the social world (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Morgan and Smircich, 1980; Cunliffe, 2011). Thus, this section reflects on the ontological and epistemological assumptions inherent within this study and how this has influenced the research approach.

Blaikie (2010: 92) explains that ontological assumptions ‘make claims about what kind of social phenomena do or can exist, the conditions of their existence and the ways in which they are related.’ In other words, ontology can be understood as the study of being, the nature of existence and what forms social reality (Gray, 2014). Compared to the natural world, the social world is created by human actors and the interactions between them. Shared meaning is inherent to the ‘artful practices of everyday life’, to conversations and texts, and is negotiated and explicit to time and place (Cunliffe, 2011).

A critical objectivist social ontology (the approach adopted in this thesis) accepts that the social world is not simply the product of human design, conceptualisation or dialogue, but it exists externally to human actors and shapes their behaviour (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000). The social world is accepted as real but with contested characteristics, and it cannot be universally understood nor entirely grasped since it is perceived from limited and positioned perspectives (Cunliffe, 2011). In this approach, social relations can be present in the world without the human actors participating in them or having knowledge about them, conceptualising them, or constructing them in dialogue (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000), yet, these social relations continue to exist. That said, human actors who replicate social phenomena have some idea of their actions, even if these are misconceptions. For example, people can reproduce disabling relations even though they clearly deny the reality of such relations. As mentioned in Chapter 2, disability is viewed as having a social relational character that understands social oppression associated with relationships, at both the macro and micro social scales, between impaired and non-impaired people (Thomas, 2010). This view allows for an analysis of disability on the public and private level that considers that individuals might experience oppression because of social relations with employers, co-workers, or structural barriers that remind them that they are different and exclude them from the labour market. Consequently, disabling relations are viewed as having a degree of objectivity about them in that these can be replicated independently of their identification (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000).

The ontological stance adopted in this thesis is therefore informed by the belief that there is a 'reality' out there; to be specific, the existence of the social oppression of disabled people occurs and that is historically, environmentally, culturally and contextually changing (Barnes, 2003). Social structures created in society are considered oppressive because they are upheld through the influence of economic and political power and legitimated through ideology (Truman et al. 2000; Harvey, 1990). These dominant social and political systems falsify reality, because they are only based on the reality interpreted by privileged groups within society, and thus generate a 'false consciousness' in individuals that keep them from perceiving the 'real structure of society' (Harvey, 1990; Mackenzie Davey and Liefoghe, 2004).

For this study adopting the social model of disability perspective is central because it accepts that disability is real and the result of collective social and environmental factors located outside the individual body and not caused by impairments located in the individual body (Woodhams and Danieli, 2004). The main aim of the social model in research is therefore to unpack disablism (Thomas, 1999; 2007), which Campbell (2008) refers to as a set of norms and practices that stimulate differential or unequal treatment of individuals on account of their real or assumed impairments. Thus, research is less concerned with the ways disabled people cope or adapt to situations, but is rather interested in identifying or the removal of disabling physical and social barriers (Stone and Priestley, 1996). In fact, Oliver (1992: 112) argues that:

'It is not disabled people who need to be examined, but able-bodied society. It is not a case of educating disabled and able-bodied people for integration, but of fighting institutional disablism, it is not disability relations, which should be the field of study, but disablism'.

This thesis adopts a critical or emancipatory research approach that is located within critical theory that was widely advocated by the disabled people's movement and scholars (Oliver, 1992; Woodhams and Danieli, 2004), which builds upon the interpretive understanding of social phenomena in that it acknowledges the knowledge and experience of people. However, it goes beyond traditional attitudes and reflects critically upon conventional norms and value claims (Habermas, 1987), because it is more interested in the way that social structures actually work and how ideology or history disguises the process, which oppresses and restrains people (Harvey, 1990). Thus, this study intends to systematically question how taken for granted ableist mind-sets hide controlling processes and tries to reveal the nature of the exploitative social relations within concepts, such as, work (Truman et al. 2000).

In the field of management studies, one powerful principle, challenged by ‘softer’ philosophies of management, has been the assumption that ‘man is economically rational and that Taylorism provides the one best way of designing and managing work’ (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992: 436). Critical theorists reject modern management theory as an interpretation of technocratic thinking that attempts to manipulate human potential and desire in order to reinforce a false naturalised status quo (Alvesson, 1987; Tinker and Lowe, 1984). Therefore, management research has faced the criticism that it has disregarded the historically, socially constructed nature of work processes and for interpreting workers needs as vital to human nature, rather than embedded within the structure of social relations in which these needs are constructed and interpreted (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992). Thus, critical research acknowledges that the structure of social relations in organisations shapes on and systematically privileges the interest and viewpoints of some groups, while silencing and marginalising others (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996). For example, within the organisation of work, abstract ideas are perceived as vital aspects of work that individuals perceive or embody. These abstract ideas have ideal qualities and behaviour and are occasionally characterised as ‘management fantasies’, however they can have a real effect on work-employer relations (Granberg, 2015).

Thus, within this study the concept of the ideal worker, based around ableist norms, is perceived to be a ‘real abstraction’ (Granberg, 2015), which can shape the actions and self-perceptions of disabled people as workers and is embedded within the design of organisational practices. Thus, knowledge produced through this critical approach can give insights into oppressive structures within the organisations of work and can assist the progress of developing a strategy towards the emancipation of disabled people in economic and social life from alienating conditions of access to and within work. This ‘emancipatory potential of reason’ is fundamental to critical research and aids to reflect critically on how the reality of the social world and the construction of self are socially produced and thus open to transformation (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992).

Epistemology describes ‘the nature of the relationship between knower or would-be knower, and what can be known’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 201). It offers a philosophical background for determining what types of knowledge are legitimate and adequate for the study in question (Gray, 2014). Truman et al. (2000) argue that fundamental to critical social research is an epistemology that is based on the belief that knowledge has no (literal) objective state, but considerations must be made about the production of knowledge. Simultaneously, however, critical approaches to research assert that critically informed knowledge is more

accurate or more objective than traditional knowledge systems, thus they expose the ‘hidden facets of reality’ around which other sets of knowledge conspire so as to hide it (Truman et al. 2000). As Harvey (1990: 4), a well-known critical theorist, notes, ‘knowledge is a process of moving towards an understanding of the world and of the knowledge which structures our understanding of that world.’

The perspective adopted in this thesis accepts a subjectivist epistemology in that there is an interaction between research participants and the researcher with values and beliefs that have an influence on the inquiry. This study acknowledges the double hermeneutic of mediation (Cunliffe, 2011). Thus, the story told is not only influenced by participants' experience of time, place and progress (historicity), but is also linked to my subjective interpretations and embedded in my experiences as a researcher, which influenced my observations, interpretations and research accounts. Thus, all knowledge created by social relations is dependent on the personality of the researcher and the research participants and the interactions between them (Holgate, 2004). Hence, the findings are value mediated and value dependent (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Scotland, 2012). The creation of knowledge within this study is inevitably intertwined in the communication between me and participants and our values, norms and experiences, which we brought into the research process. The methodological nature of this study is therefore based on a dialogue between the participants and myself in the form of qualitative interviews. This dialogue is dialectical in nature to transform participants’ and my own unawareness or misconception of traditional knowledge systems into more informed consciousness about the real reality and to find a way to challenge these social structures that individuals encounter in order to comprehend what actions are required for effective change (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The next part of this chapter reflects on methodological considerations when adopting an emancipatory approach to disability research that this study intends to adopt.

### **Adopting an emancipatory approach to disability research**

An emancipatory approach to disability research has been adopted as a way to challenge the limitations of positivist and interpretivist paradigm to disability research and is informed by the social model of disability. While former studies highlighted numerous economic and social consequences of this ascription of a ‘disabled identity’ by use of either quantitative or qualitative methods, they neglected to question their ideological underpinning that has been diversely named the ‘individual’, ‘medical’ or ‘personal tragedy’ model of disability (Barnes et al. 2002). It has been argued that academics working from within either positivist

or interpretivist paradigm to disability research took on the role as expert or 'knower' and disabled people were still seen as passive objects and not as active participants in the research process (Oliver, 1992; Stone and Priestley, 1996). This role inevitably, but in some occasions undeniably, preserves that the knowledge and experience of disabled people is not significant (Stone and Priestley, 1996).

Thus, by adopting an emancipatory approach to disability research, this study is less concerned with the ways that disabled people can cope or adapt to situations, but is rather interested in identifying or the removal of disabling physical and social barriers that disabled people face in the labour market (Stone and Priestley, 1996). However, it is important to acknowledge that this approach has also faced criticism within disability studies itself, which this section intends to clarify and reflect on.

Stone and Priestley (1996) point out in their six core principles, that emancipatory research is grounded on the social model of disability and committed both to a social analysis of disablement and to the developments of the disabled people's movement. These principles establish the epistemological standpoint for the researcher and reject objective detachability by acknowledging the subjective influence of the researcher and participants within the research process. While Danieli and Woodhams (2005) acknowledge that disability is socially constructed, a researcher that adopts this view needs to be aware that any subsequent 'data' generated will always be interpreted through the lens of this 'theory'. They believe that merely replacing one 'theory' with another does not reveal the 'reality' of the phenomena. Using the social model of disability as underlying perspective might represent the reality and experiences of the majority of people, but it cannot be claimed to be more accurate than other representations of reality. Thus, this emancipatory approach does not resolve how one should deal with views during the research process that might not conform to the social model experience of disability (Danieli and Woodhams, 2005).

Moreover, another principle is to 'reverse' or transform the control over research production, including the financing of research, in order to guarantee full responsibility to disabled people and their organisations (Oliver, 1992; Barnes, 1992). Yet, Danielie and Woohams (2005) criticise that conducting empirical research might not dissolve power relationships between researchers and researched. In fact, Danieli and Woodhams (2005) explain that it is important to acknowledge the social model perspective is inherent within the emancipatory approach, and openness about it to participants might hinder rather than remove power differentials between researcher and researched. Given that not all disabled people confirm to the social



model of disability (see, Barnes, 1992; Priestley, 1997) there is a danger then that the researcher is still viewed as 'expert' by 'less confident participants' (Danieli and Woodhams, 2005).

Furthermore, emancipatory research recognises both commonality and difference in the experience of disablement, to give voice to the 'personal as political' and at the same time tries to collectivise the political similarity of individual experiences (Morris, 1991). Danieli and Woodhams (2005) challenge this principle and question how researchers can deal with data that reflects experiences from a medical model of disability, which is 'priori' seen as disabling (a political position). Thus, they argue that there is a conflict between the political directives of an emancipatory approach and the epistemological requirements to produce accurate interpretations of disability. In fact, the danger is to prioritize political directives and to ignore views that might not represent a social model or dismiss them as a form of 'false consciousness' (Danieli and Woodhams, 2005).

Emancipatory research is mostly linked to a qualitative, rather than quantitative, research design. Stone and Priestley (1996) explain that there is not one single methodology to data collection within this paradigm. In fact, Abberley (1992) acknowledges the importance of quantitative research when underpinned by the social model of disability and that large-scale research and detailed empirical work on the material conditions of disablement can help satisfy both the macro and micro comprehension of the oppression of disabled people and individuals' needs. Therefore, it is not the nature of methodology adopted (qualitative vs. quantitative) that decides on whether research is emancipatory, but the theoretical paradigm, which guides the collection and analysis of the data (Stone and Priestley, 1996).

While Oliver (1997) shows confidence in the emancipatory research and that it can oppose the ideology of dominant approaches to research paradigms, he is not certain whether it is able to challenge dominant methodologies. Thus, he suggests that:

'... research can only be judged emancipatory after the event; one cannot 'do' emancipatory research (nor write methodology cookbooks on how to do it)' (Oliver, 1997: 25).

Similarly, Shakespeare (1996) reflects on his own research in which he tries to follow his own intellectual and ethical standards rather than to conform to an 'orthodoxy'. While Danieli and Woodhams (2004) demonstrate that critical reflections on the emancipatory approach are welcome and propose that there is some resistance towards adopting this approach

becoming 'hegemonic', they also highlight that these nonconforming voices, at least in the public domain, are in the minority.

Indeed, the majority of scholars appear to be in favour of maintaining the emancipatory model of research, as the most suitable way of undertaking disability research (Barnes, 2003; Stone and Priestley, 1996). In fact, Barnes (2003: 4) explains that it:

'... has made an important contribution to the disability research agenda and that in certain aspects it is no longer far removed from other more mainstream research strategies'

Thus, he demonstrates that a large amount of recent and more current research studies adhere on several levels to an emancipatory research model. Indeed, Stone and Priestley (1996) are reflexive and contend that there are methodological challenges when adopting this approach. They clarify that by reflecting on emancipatory principles, none of the advocates of this paradigm (including themselves) have yet been able to achieve a 'truly emancipatory research' within the framework of a field study. Thus, they stress that:

'As researchers who have decided to explore disablement, we believe that it is vital to face up to these challenges and that, where we anticipate contractions and difficulties, we might use them as a point of entry into a more critical analysis of the emancipatory paradigm' (Stone and Priestley, 1996: 706).

They acknowledge that it is very difficult to achieve emancipatory research, and researchers should be reflexive by recognising any methodological issues faced throughout the process of the study.

The section has acknowledged the methodological considerations that scholars have explored above. This research is designed to be an emancipatory research and accepts the importance of the social model of disability as a powerful organising principle, and practical tool. By acknowledging the importance of the social model for disabled people, research might not be able to analyse or replicate disability in totality, but as Oliver (1996) argues, it can be used to aid our understanding of disability. This thesis intended to add to the theoretical literature of the 'extended social model of disability' (Thomas, 2004; Reeve, 2014), which not only focused on external oppression, but also considers that individuals might face internal oppression (see Chapter 2). By adopting this analytical tool, this research can provide insights into the personal experiences of disability, in form of direct and indirect psycho-emotional disability that can exclude someone from employment as effectively as structural

barriers. However, I acknowledge that not every disabled person might experience this form of disablism, and it might change with time and place. This study was led by disabled people and the disability studies literature rather than the recruitment literature, because mainstream debates on recruitment fell short to record and recognise the agenda of disabled people and their organisations, even though the employment gap between non-disabled and disabled people has been a deep-rooted and apparently obstinate problem in the UK. This enabled the study to discover these deeper experiences of disablement that jobseekers had experienced in the labour market, in interaction with organisations and during their job searches online. While this study was designed around emancipatory principles, I accept Oliver's (1997) point, that research can only be judged emancipatory after the project is undertaken. The next section sets out the why a qualitative research design has been adopted for this study and reflects on the position of the non-disabled researcher within disability studies.

### **A qualitative research design**

This study has adopted a qualitative research design and the research methods used reflect this choice (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). This section demonstrates the reasons for choosing a qualitative research design. Likewise, it shows the centrality of adopting a reflexive approach that acknowledges and reflects on the relationship between the participants and the non-disabled researcher in qualitative research.

For this research project, a qualitative research design seemed most appropriate, to understand how people use language, routinely and artistically, to shape and enact social realities, identities and actions in their everyday exchanges and conduct (Watson, 2001). Mason (2002) illustrates that through qualitative research one is able to investigate a wide array of dimensions of the social world, understandings, experiences and thoughts of research participants, the way social processes, institutions, or relationships work, and the importance of the meanings that they generate. Moreover, she explains that qualitative approach is interested in what way the world is interpreted, experienced, understood, produced and established. Accordingly, the main aim of qualitative research is to generate rounded and circumstantial understandings based on rich, nuance and comprehensive data (Mason, 2002).

The research methods used for this study were semi-structured interviews, which were recorded, with permission, and then transcribed. Compared to unstructured interviews, semi-

structured interviews are based around a set of questions, but they allow for flexibility to pick up on things said by the interviewee (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The emphasis throughout this interview process should be on how the interviewees shape and understand events and issues, that is what they felt was significant in describing or understanding patterns, events or forms of behaviour (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The reason for undertaking qualitative interviews is based on my subjectivist epistemological underpinning, that knowledge, views, understandings or experiences are meaningful properties of the social reality, which my research questions are designed to explore (Mason, 2002). I acknowledge that experiences and understandings that interviewees share can only be constructed or reconstructed in interviews, and this method is therefore dependent on individuals to conceptualise, remember and verbalise their experiences (Mason, 2002). It is therefore significant that their understandings are not used as a direct reflection of understandings 'already existing' outside of the interview exchange, in such a way that it would reveal actual facts (Mason, 2002; 65). Likewise, it is important to not overvalue the representative and reflective qualities of interview transcripts or audio recordings. This means that an interview transcript or audio recording is always limited partly because it is an inadequate record of non-verbal qualities of interaction and also because judgements are made by the researcher about which verbal statements to turn into text, and how to do it (Mason, 2002).

Therefore, interviews should be seen as a complex social and cultural event, thus, the adoption of a reflexive approach is important to consider a variety of theoretical viewpoints that influence knowledge production. Alvesson and Ashcraft (2012) advocate that researchers should approach the interview method in a more reflective way, because without a theoretical understanding that supports critical judgement, based on the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the researcher, any interview material could be exposed to naivety because it allows for an analysis that is poorly grounded. Adopting a qualitative methodology within the larger philosophical position that guides the study, rather than prioritising a technique or contributing to 'best practice' methods that separate the technique from the epistemology, are of high importance to qualitative researcher (Alvesson and Ashcraft, 2012).

Given that this study used feedback loops, as a method to give disabled people the chance to participate in the research process by providing me with constructive feedback (Kitchin, 2000), a reflexive approach was central in order to understand the relationship between the research participants and me during the fieldwork. Reflexivity includes both an openness and honesty about my own position, and a thoughtful reflection on my responsibility as

researchers (Mackenzie Davey and Liefoghe, 2004). As Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 15) note, 'there is no way in which we can escape the social world in order to study it'. By this, they mean that when adopting qualitative research there always exists a relationship between the researcher and the researched. The researcher has to be reflective on this relationship and acknowledge that reflexivity is central to understanding the practice of qualitative research (Willis, 2007). It was therefore important not to lose sight of my position as a researcher in the social context in which my study took place. The next section reflects on this position as a non-disabled researcher when undertaking disability research.

### **A reflexive approach: The role of the non-disabled researcher**

Within disability research, it has been argued that non-disabled researchers lack the authority to speak on behalf of disabled people, because they have no personal experience of disabling barriers (Barnes and Mercer, 1997; Humphrey, 2000). Humphrey (2000) notes that since the social model has declared as a way to confront disabling effects and the self-organisation of disabled people in challenging the disabling society, this society has been viewed as being arranged by and for non-disabled people, hence they are subject to be considered with the 'enemy camp'. This simplistic perspective as Humphrey (2000) explains has suppressed the 'psyches' of activists rather than the texts of academics, and it has created some tension in the writing of some academic-activists. For instance, Branfield (1998) argues that the experience, the history, the culture of non-disabled people is the oppression that disabled people face. She points out that the relationship between non-disabled people and the disabled people's movement is very difficult, if not impossible. Branfield (1998) does not deny that there are non-disabled people who demonstrate an admirable commitment in fighting inequality, but she perceives that as disabled people 'we must, in order to break from our past, be the initiators and designers of our own liberation.' (p.144). Therefore, she contends that only disabled people should undertake disability research.

On the contrary, academic-activists such as Barnes, Oliver or Shakespeare were more open to invite non-disabled researchers into the field of disability studies in order to enhance the process of empowering disabled people and to educate non-disabled people. For example, Barnes (1992) says that it is not necessary to be a disabled person in order to produce good qualitative research within the emancipatory model. Emancipatory research is essentially concerned with the systematic disclosure of processes and structures that create disability and should be based on the foundation of a workable 'dialogue' between the research community and disabled people in order to promote empowerment. Within critical research,

emancipation and empowerment are used synonymously and described with reference to disclosing social barriers, shifting perceptions of disability and provoking political action (Barnes, 1992). Likewise, Stone and Priestley (1996) state that the critique of non-disabled researchers within disability studies has weakened, not only as a result of the encouragement from disabled people and disabled people's organisations, but likewise through the recognition that disability status alone does not guarantee emancipatory research. Although some scholars within the field of disability studies have opposing views on the role of the non-disabled researcher within disability studies, they agree on the main principles upon which emancipatory approaches to research should be designed on. Thus, the main priority in embracing this approach to research for a researcher should be the implementation of the social model of disability with a strong political commitment to the disabled people's movement, but also the adoption of non-exploitative research methods and a commitment to findings that can help combat oppression (Barnes, 1992; Oliver, 1992; Shakespeare, 1993; Stone and Priestley, 1996).

For that reason, my priority as a non-disabled researcher within this field is based on the social model of disability with the aim of having a clear political commitment to the disabled people's movement. As far as I was able, I adopted the use of non-exploitive, qualitative, research methods, which were reflective towards minimising any harm for participants and to represent as genuinely as possible the experiences of disabled people (Shakespeare, 1996). However, agreeing with Shakespeare (1996), it is impossible to equalise the relationship between researcher and participants completely. As discussed in more detail below, I used 'feedback loops' in my study, where I encouraged participants to provide me with constructive feedback throughout the fieldwork (Kitchin, 2000). I tried to empower individuals to influence the research process by giving them the opportunity to correct misinterpretations and to influence the direction of the research. Most importantly, I intend to use my academic position to share the stories of participants and to promote a meaningful outcome for the disabled movement. The aim of this study is to stay in contact with disabled people's organisations even after the fieldwork and to continuously contribute to the disabled people's movement by recognising the agenda of disabled people and their organisations within my research. I anticipate sharing my findings with the two disabled people's organisations that took part in my study and to reflect with them on further collaborative actions that could be undertaken to challenge disability inequality embedded within online recruitment and selection practices.

## **Formulating the research questions: disabled people and job searching online**

This study positions itself within the literature that challenges the underlying assumptions of existing organisational and management research by critiquing social, cultural, economic and disabling structures that constrain individuals with impairments during their job seeking and application when the online recruitment process is based on the notion of the ideal worker (Acker, 1990; Foster and Wass, 2013). This study has been an extension of my Master dissertation (A Study of Accessible E-Recruitment) that I completed in 2011 at Leeds University Business School (LUBS). During that fieldwork, I established a network of contacts within organisations that promote the employment of disabled people in the UK. One of these organisations was The Clear Company (Company H); an auditing firm that supports inclusive recruitment practices. I was successful in being awarded a LUBS studentship in 2012, in collaboration with the Company H, which helped me to extend my Master thesis into a PhD project. The Company H has not been involved in funding, designing or conducting this project, but it has taken the role as gatekeeper during the fieldwork, which is discussed later in this chapter.

Given this, the broad aim and research questions were formulated prior to the beginning of this PhD and part of the student scholarship advertised by LUBS. I acknowledge that disabled people were not directly involved in setting the research agenda or the funding of the research, but I intend to co-design any further disability research after my PhD. For this project, however it was solely my decision to adopt an emancipatory approach, where I built in 'feedback' processes within the research design to make sure that disabled people were able influence the research undertaken to a certain extent.

At the outset of my project, I wanted to collaborate with two disabled people's organisations that were run by and for disabled people and which provided employment support for disabled people. The motivation for involving disabled people's organisations was my acknowledgement of the social model of disability and my aim to undertake an emancipatory approach to disability research. This rationale was supported by Priestley et al. (2010), who emphasised that there is a need for academia to collaborate more with disabled people's organisation during research projects, when researchers engage with social model or rights-based approaches to disability research. These authors demonstrated that when researchers engage with disabled people's organisations it presents opportunities for advocacy to transfer the research findings into policy and practice. Moreover, disabled people's organisations can also help to translate findings in a more accessible way to target knowledge transfer outcomes

for disabled people, service providers or policy maker. Both disabled people's organisations involved within my research promote the social model of disability and advocate for the full inclusion of disabled people within society. I wanted to make sure that my research has meaningful practical outcomes for disabled people. During the initial communication stage with these two disabled people's organisations, my contacts confirmed that the research topic was an area of interest and it would be useful for them to be investigated from a social model perspective. They explained that employers and their use of online recruitment and selection had been proven to be a significant barrier for disabled people who used their employment services.

This study sought to answer a number of research questions exploring the impact of disability inequality during disabled people's job searches, and also whether employers were aware of the impact of social barriers to the recruitment of disabled people. These two key questions arose by reviewing current equality literature on online recruitment and selection practices.

The literature suggested that online recruitment and selection practices might lead to disability inequality for individuals with impairments in the current labour market (Hogler et al. 1998; Cappelli 2001; Barber, 2006; Bruyere, 2008). In fact, to date there has not been any empirical studies that have investigated whether online recruitment and selection practices have had an impact on the job search experience of disabled jobseekers. This led to formulating the last two research questions, which this study has attempted to answer. These investigate the ways in which disabled people respond to online recruitment and selection practices, and how these experiences shaped the future approaches of individuals to seeking and applying for employment.

### **Sampling strategy**

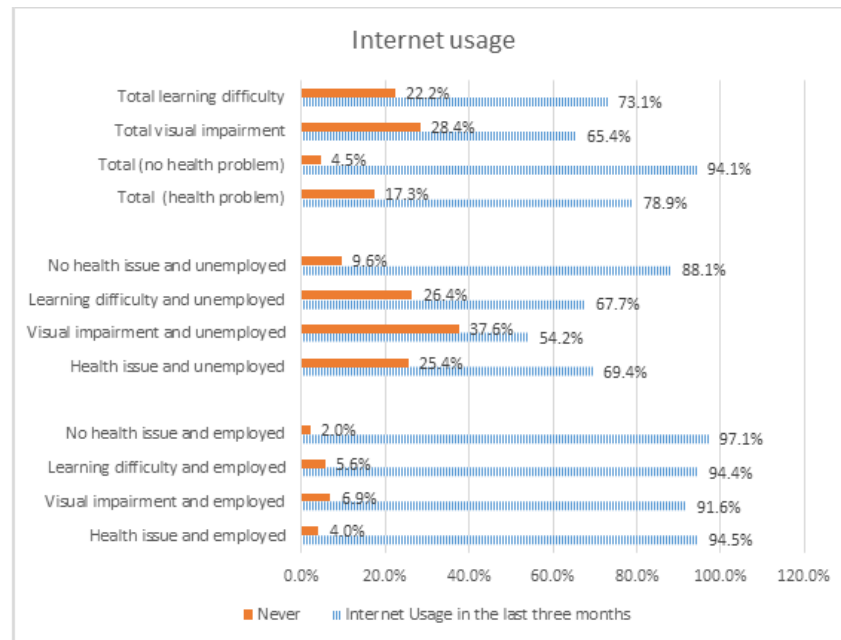
As a way of choosing participants for a study, researchers within the field of disability studies have always used disability literature and statistics in order to identify particular groups with impairments that have been excluded historically within disability research. This thesis has identified two gaps within the disability and management literature.

First, the disability literature (see Chapter 2) demonstrates that there is a gap within emancipatory approaches to disability literature and that the voices of individuals with visual impairments and the voices of individuals with learning difficulties were only limited represented (Walmsley, 1997; Chappell and Lawthom, 2001; Duckett and Pratt, 2007).



Second, quantitative data (see Figure 1) suggests that the likelihood of having Internet access is much lower for unemployed individuals who have an impairment compared to those who have no impairment (Pilling et al. 2004; LFS, 2015; Scholz et al. 2017).

**Figure 1: Author’s own figure of data from the UK Labour Force Survey 2015**



Thus, there is a clear indication within the data presented in Figure 1 of the Labour Force Survey in 2015 that exclusion from the Internet is higher for unemployed individuals who have visual impairments or learning difficulties, which might have an impact on their job searches, in particular when recruitment and selection practices are relocated to the Internet. Up until now, there has been no research that has concentrated on investigating the impact of online recruitment and selection practices for these groups.

This thesis tries to rectify this gap and contribute to this literature by including the voices of individuals with learning difficulties and visual impairments within this study. However, to fully capture the picture of these new evolving online recruitment and selection practices, this study has also selected HR managers and advisors as another group of the population to understand whether employers are aware of social barriers that disabled people face in regards to online recruitment processes.

After these groups of participants were chosen it was necessary to find ways of getting access to individuals who would be able to provide insight into helping to answer the research questions. Careful consideration was given on how to collect the necessary data and to meet the research aim set out for this study (Saunders, 2012). This study proposed to use a non-

probability, self-selection sampling approach, thus the number of interviews was not established from the outset, and dependant on voluntary participation (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Saunders, 2012). This sampling strategy can make sure that individuals have the chance to identify themselves as participants and that they feel that the research is important, and they therefore want to devote their time to it (Saunders, 2012). The next section reflects on ethical considerations that are important to reflect on before undertaking fieldwork.

### **Ethical considerations**

By adopting an emancipatory approach to disability research, it was important to reflect on the ethical considerations that were intrinsic to the process of designing, conducting and analysing the research. I have adopted an open approach to ethical inquiry that fully informed research participants about the purpose of the research, the methods used and the intended use of findings before conducting the research. During the process of designing the emancipatory research a number of considerations had to be reflected. These were: to tailor the information sheets and consent forms for participants with different impairments; to clarify who would be in control of the research; and the role of volunteering within disabled people's organisations. These issues are addressed in detail below in order to reflect back on the methodological considerations advocated above.

### **A need for tailored information for participants**

From the outset, I planned on including disabled people within my study. After reviewing the disability literature, I decided to concentrate on interviewing individuals with learning difficulties and individuals with visual impairments, because there has only been limited emancipatory research that included either group as participants (see Chapter 2). Given this, I was required to tailor my participant information sheets and consent forms in order to make sure that the research design was accessible to individuals. I used the University of Leeds Research Ethics Policy and guidance by the Office for Disability Issues on involving disabled people in social research.

Obtaining informed consent from research participants can present an ethical challenge to researchers, in particular when involving the participation of individuals with learning difficulties. There has been a tension between guaranteeing that people with learning difficulties understand the nature and the involvement in research and that they are not pressured to take part against their will (Cameron and Murphy, 2006). Undertaking research therefore requires the researcher to provide accessible and understandable information in

form of symbols or images, as well as, the use of simple language or face-to-face explanations (Cameron and Murphy, 2006).

Moreover, it was of high importance to recognise that individuals can have a diverse range of learning difficulties, which can be mild, moderate or severe. Some people who have a mild learning difficulty might not need a lot of support in their lives and therefore would not consider themselves disabled. Dyslexia, for instance, is referred to as mild learning difficulty that can have an impact on an individual's learning or they might face reading, writing and spelling difficulties. It does not affect a person's understanding and individuals are able to make their own decisions (Mencap, 2017). Other people with more severe learning impairments however might need support with getting dressed or filling out forms. Therefore, some individuals might not be able to give their own consent and require a guardian to give the consent on their behalf. It was therefore important to consider that there are no risks involved for participants. This involved the acknowledgement that individuals might have experienced multiple forms of inequality throughout their lives, where their decisions were not recognised. Consent in this study was therefore an on-going process to make sure that participants did not feel pressured to take part (Cameron and Murphy, 2006).

By reflecting on these considerations, I decided to only include individuals with mild learning difficulties as research participants, who were able to give their own consent in order to take part in the research. I wanted to make sure that people were able to understand the purpose of my study and that the decision to take part was based on their own free will. I acknowledged that findings of this study therefore only represent experiences of individuals with learning difficulties who were in the position of getting employment support from disabled people's organisations. Thus, this study does not demonstrate experiences of individuals with more severe learning difficulties who might be more marginalised.

Therefore, I made the information sheets and informed consent forms accessible in easy read format and in different font sizes (see Appendix A and B). Every individual (jobseeker, employment advisor and employer) received an information sheet in an accessible format that included details about the research project and my contact information prior to the research. I encouraged all participants to tell me whether they had other requirements that they felt were not addressed. Before the interviews, I explained both documents to them in person and they had time to ask any questions or request clarifications. All participants volunteered to take part in this study and had the option to leave the research process at any point in time without giving the reason for their departure. Only three research participants

changed their minds prior to the interviews scheduled, which was respected and acknowledged.

### **Who is in control of the research?**

In line with the emancipatory principles mentioned I wanted to involve disabled people's organisations and disabled people partly in my research design. This study has been funded by Leeds University Business School as part of my PhD Studentship and I was the only researcher undertaking it. My initial intentions have been to give disabled people the opportunities to identify interview questions for employers and HR managers. The Ethics committee at the University of Leeds however thought that this was an issue and questioned whether this would be an independent piece of research if the organisations developed the questions.

I acknowledged this consideration of the Ethics committee, which had shifted the intended collaborated research production to an independent piece of research in line with the PhD guidelines. However, I maintained that disabled people would have the opportunities to give me feedback, to correct any misinterpretations, and to provide me with direct suggestions for employers within my study, which influenced the research process. Yet, I was primarily responsible for the design, planning and executing of this study. Given the way this PhD studentship was funded and the concern of the Ethics committee, my research does not truly comply with the emancipatory principle to 'reverse' the research production (Oliver, 1992). This shows one methodological consideration that researchers should reflect on when planning on undertaking a more collaborative approach during a PhD project.

### **Volunteer or Researcher?**

As already mentioned above, I decided to approach two disabled people's organisations in order to get access to disabled people who might be willing to participate within my study, but also to be a volunteer. I did not have to become a volunteer in order to get access to the organisation. The intention behind volunteering was that I wanted to learn more about the work that disabled people's organisations do, to improve my own understanding of disability and to get more involved in their community. Being a volunteer was not just instrumental in order to get access, but it was an important part to challenge my own view of reality as a non-disabled person and to acknowledge the importance of the social model of disability for disabled people and their organisations.

From the start, I was open about doing a PhD project and my intention of volunteering when I approached both disabled people's organisations. I had to comply with ethical procedures that the organisation had for working with researchers, but also for having me as a volunteer. These included in the first organisation: a DBS check, reading through policies, such as, equality and diversity policies, and the organisations compliance to the social model, I familiarised myself with the premises and the fire exit routes, and I also attended a visual awareness training. This training was designed for volunteers in order to make them aware of the social model of disability and to challenge any myths regarding individuals with visual impairments. During the training, I was given a variety of spectacles that replicated the different types of visual impairments that individuals might have. This training helped me to understand that there are different impairment types and how organisations adopt the social model of disability within their everyday practices. Volunteering took place every few weeks (from August 2014 to October 2016) in this organisation and exceeded the time of the fieldwork.

In the second organisation, I also had to read through different policies and I was shown over the premises and the fire exit routes. This organisation was smaller and did not have any written ethical procedures for working with researchers, but I was educated about research ethics on my first day of volunteering. I undertook my volunteering more frequently, sometimes even twice a week, from February 2014 to February 2015.

A key consideration was to be reflective on this process and to be aware that no disabled jobseeker that I got in contact with during my volunteering felt obligated to take part in my study. The Ethics Committee also raised this issue and I responded that I relied on self-selection of volunteers for my interviews and if individuals were not interested in taking part in interviews, I would acknowledge their wishes. The tasks of my volunteering included doing some online research on specific topics or putting data into a filing programme. Only in rare occasions was I directly involved in providing some support for disabled jobseekers. For instance, I was supporting one employment advisor with a job club that he organised for disabled jobseekers. At the first day of this job club I meet two disabled jobseekers and I asked them, individually, whether they would be interested in taking part in my study. My research was separate from the job club and the participation in the job club was in no way affected by their decisions of whether or not to take part in the study. Both agreed to take part and we arranged another day for the interviews. Not only did I provided them with the information sheets and my contact details, but I also explained to every individual that their participation is voluntarily and that he or she could change their mind at any given time. It

was of great importance for me to not pressure individuals to take part in this study against their will. Therefore, asking for their consent has been an on-going process during my research in order to make sure that I complied with these ethical considerations and the aim and intentions of my research. Taking all these ethical considerations into account, the next section reflects on the fieldwork and how I gained access to research participants.

### **The use of gatekeepers to gain access**

The gatekeepers for my study were: the Clear Company (Company H) and my PhD supervisor. Both gatekeepers were able to directly introduce me to a contact working for a disabled people's organisation that provided employment support for people with learning difficulties or visual impairments. These introductions enabled me to negotiate access to the two disabled people's organisations within this thesis that were interested in collaborating with me on my research. Company E is based in West Yorkshire, but had other offices around the UK, and Company D is based in North West of England (see Appendix G).

Company D and Company E cite in their organisational policies the social model of disability and acknowledge that disabled people are disabled because of society's attitudes rather than due to their impairments. They state that they try to challenge these socially constructed barriers in society. Both disabled people's organisations take the role as 'intermediary' when providing employment support for disabled people, in that they are the contact between employer and jobseeker (Granovetter, 1995). However, it has to be mentioned that this employment support provided is different compared that offered by public employment agencies, such as the Jobcentre Plus. Therefore, disabled people's organisations fall into what Granovetter (1995) calls the 'hybrid form' of intermediary, which can be of great value for jobseekers in their job search. He describes that the employment support offered by these organisations is not just designed around matching a person to a job solely based on information provided by both sides (employer and jobseeker). On the contrary, employment advisors, all but one of whom were disabled themselves (see Table 1-2), that provide this support are concerned with getting to know the jobseeker to provide individual peer-support, but also work on building a long-standing relationship with local employers to support individuals employment (Granovetter, 1995). In order to achieve a more relational approach, each employment advisor only provides employment support to a small number of jobseekers during the same period, compared to the public employment support provided by the Jobcentre Plus. At the Jobcentre Plus, employment advisors are required to provide support to a significant higher number of jobseekers, where the service that individuals

receive is underpinned by a work first nature rather than a human capital approach (Lindsay et al. 2007; 2013). This means that the aim of the employment support is to move people quickly into jobs, irrespective of the quality of the job or the barriers individuals might face, rather than to develop their skills and education to find them sustainable employment (Iversen and Stephens, 2008; Lindsay et al. 2007; 2013). Thus, it has to be acknowledged that employment services by both disabled people's organisations are only provided to a small number of jobseekers. Consequently, the number of individuals that I was able to recruit for the interviews is fairly small compared to other studies that might use Jobcentre Plus as gate keeper. While this could be seen as a limitation, I was able to interview most clients who used these employment services and who were willing to take part in this study. Moreover, this study has also provided insight into the way that disabled people's organisations design their employment support services based on a more relational approach that is not underpinned by sanctions and conditionality of the public employment system (Lindsay et al. 2013).

Furthermore, it is important to note that people self-identify as disabled when they request employment services of both disabled people's organisations. This is different compared to the public employment services provided from Jobcentre Plus, where individuals have to undertake a medical Work Capability Assessment (WCA) to be classed as disabled in line with the legal regime to receive employment support (Lindsay et al. 2013). Thus, individuals voluntarily use the support services offered by both disabled people's organisations and are not forced to see employment advisors nor are they sanctioned if they miss an appointment. To receive employment support from both disabled people's organisations, individuals have to contact the local council or the disabled people's organisations directly and ask for a referral to an employment advisor. These organisations do not run employment services that are paid by results but are funded through a combination of public sector contracts and charitable trusts and foundations. In both cases, there is such a high demand for these services that some people interested in the support are put on waiting lists. Moreover, the employment support also does not stop once a jobseeker has found employment, unlike the support given by the Jobcentre. This in-work care support has been used by some jobseekers within the study, for instance when they faced issues with their employer. In general, it can be said that the services were designed around respectful relations between disabled jobseekers and employment advisors. With the help of both disabled people's organisations I recruited disabled jobseekers, who use the employment services, for my interviews.

In addition, my studentship partner, Company H, helped me get access to employers who worked mostly for private sector organisations. (see Table 3). Some of these organisations had already made progress to make their recruitment practices more inclusive and others were at the beginning of this process.

The fieldwork for this study was divided into two stages: First, I recruited disabled jobseekers who used the employment services of the disabled people's organisations. Secondly, I recruited HR managers and HR advisors for interviews.

### **Listening to multiple voices and stories**

The research methods used were semi-structured interviews, as discussed above, these were used to learn about individuals' knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences and interactions with the social reality of oppression (see Chapter 2), which my research questions were designed to explore (Mason, 2002). Before the interviews, I identified a broad agenda of topics prior to the interviews, which made sure that the relevant issues that I was interested in were covered in all interviews (see Appendix D and E). Questions were specified, yet I was able to probe beyond answers and to engage in a dialogue with the interviewees. The flexibility through the interview process helped to pick up things used by participants to make sense of their social world. One important aspect of qualitative interviewing, as Mason (2002) says, has been to be receptive to what research participants say and to acknowledge their ways of understanding the world. This means to accept that individuals might have different understanding of the social world compared to my understanding of it (Danieli and Woodhams, 2004). For instance, they might interpret their experiences through the lens of the medical model of disability rather than my social model of disability view. This experience however was not dismissed, but rather explored in order to understand it from an individual's standpoint.

Moreover, it was important to recognise that some interviewees shared more information with me than others. I acknowledged that one single interview cannot provide an insight into the boarder social forces and procedures that this research investigated. Yet, the aim of this study was to contribute to the micro level understanding of oppression from the dialogues between the researcher and participants (Stone and Priestley, 1996). Thus, the qualitative data, collected from a series of interviews combined, tell the final story presented in this thesis and to contribute to the understanding of the experiences of disabled jobseekers with online recruitment and selection practices.



## **Interviews with disabled jobseekers and employment advisors**

The first part of my fieldwork was concerned with establishing a dialogue between disabled people and myself as the researcher. The main aim of each interview was to give voice to disabled people by demonstrating the commonality and difference in individual's experience with social barriers during job searches and job applications. It was important for this research to interview disabled people first to understand the barriers that they had experienced when engaging with the online recruitment process, before speaking to employers who design and use these practices.

In line with the ethical considerations addressed above, I provided individuals with information sheets and informed consent forms in an accessible format (See Appendix A and B). I relied on a self-selection sampling strategy and voluntary participation.

Employment advisors that worked for disabled people's organisations helped distribute these documents to their clients and potential recruits were able to contact me directly or via their employment advisors to set up a convenient time and place for the interviews. Most of these employment advisors were disabled themselves, because of the way that both involved disabled people's organisations are run. Before conducting any interviews, I made sure that I had a dialogue with prospective participants about my research, my intentions and I gave them an opportunity to ask any questions. After the interviews, research participants had the chance to review the written interview transcripts. However, only one person made use of this option and I made sure that it was in an accessible format.

In total, this study conducted 22 interviews with jobseekers with visual impairments or learning difficulties and their personal employment advisors over a period of 12 months (see Table 1 and 2). Interviews lasted from 20 minutes to almost an hour. The variety of length in the interviews was similar to other disability research. For instance, Kitchin (2000) undertook research with disabled people, where the interviews lasted from 25 minutes to over 3 hours.

All 22 jobseekers in this study were interviewed using an interview guide, as listed in Appendix D. Here, topics and points were outlined in advance, however the researcher had the opportunity to adapt the wording used to ask the questions and also the sequence in which the questions were answered. As a result, the researcher had much greater freedom to explore particular roads of enquiry and logical gaps within the data could be anticipated and closed. The format of the interviews was based on a conversation as long as I was able to

ensure that all topics of interest were studied. The particular points covered during the conversation helped to identify 7 themes: (1) whether individuals had prior work experience or other experiences, such as volunteering (2) their general opinions concerning work and future goals (3) whether they thought that they had faced discrimination by employers or other actors within the labour market (4) in what ways individuals engaged in applying for jobs online, and/or any barriers they had faced (5) in what way employers can make the online recruitment process more inclusive (6) any other recommendations they had for employers, and lastly, (7) additional issues they wanted to discuss during the interview. During the interviews, I tried to engage individuals in conversations and asked probing questions where appropriate, to make sure that the participants' perspectives were fully captured (Legard et al. 2003). However, given the emancipatory nature of the interviews, individuals were in no way forced to elaborate on any negative encounters and the depths of the experiences shared therefore differed. This had therefore an impact on the duration of the interviews.

It is important to note that some interviews took longer than others. This can be explained in that some individuals were more open to provide full detail of the barriers or social relations that they encountered with employers, colleagues or other actors that were disabling to them. Moreover, individuals taking part in this study had a variety of work experiences and job seeking experiences. Thus, some individuals were unemployed for many years and/or worked as volunteers, or they had only in the past years finished school and engaged in job seeking activities. Individuals either dropped out of school (1), finished primary school (1), gained GCSEs (5), a college degree (8), a bachelor's degree (2), a master's degree (1), NVQs (3), or were undertaking studies at the moment the interview took place (1). All but four individuals were searching for a job at the time of my fieldwork.

Likewise, the age of participants also played a detrimental role in determining the job search experiences that individuals had, and the depths of experiences shared during the interviews. As Table 1 and 2 demonstrate, ten out of 22 jobseekers were in their early twenties and had therefore only just graduated from secondary school or college. The majority (8 out of 10) of these interviews took 20 to 22 minutes. Individuals had started to engage with job searches but had fewer experiences of the labour market. It was important to capture these experiences in order to understand whether there was a difference between the labour market and job seeking experiences of individuals who grew up with computers and the Internet, and others who did not. This was needed to fully understand in what way the move from

traditional towards online recruitment had created further social barriers for disabled people or not.

The majority (12 out of 22) interviews took nearly 30 minutes to almost an hour, see Table 1 and 2. Individuals were open to go into more depth on some of the relevant issues, concerning theme 1 and 3 to 6. Here jobseekers spoke about their experiences of the labour market, predominately the barriers that they had faced during work and whilst seeking jobs on and offline. Likewise, they offered recommendations to employers and what they thought organisations should do differently to make the process of recruitment more inclusive for them personally, but also for disabled people in general. Engagement with these questions varied depending on the past experiences of inclusion or exclusion in the labour market that individuals had encountered, their type of impairment(s) and whether or not individuals were born with their impairment or not. Some jobseekers had acquired their impairment whilst being at work and had faced barriers later during their working lives. Their experiences of disability differed compared to individuals who were born with their impairments. In this study 13 out of 22 participants were born with their visual impairments or learning difficulties, as to the remainder of individuals who acquired their visual impairments during their adult life, whilst being in employment.

Before the interviews started, time was spent to talk through the information sheet and informed consent, which was provided in different accessible formats, and interviewees were able to ask me any questions or provide me with constructive feedback on the documents. This part of the interview, which took on average 10 to 15 minutes, was not recorded.

All but six interviews took place at the offices of the two disabled people's organisations. Three interviews were conducted at two other disabled people's organisations that work with Company E. Two more were taking place at individual's homes, and one in a café. These were the usual places where employment advisors met up with their clients. Jobseekers were asked prior to the meet up whether they agreed that I could join and undertake the interviews there. Six participants were currently in part-time employment; one of them was also an employment advisor. Nine undertook voluntary work for different (mostly) non-profit organisations, whereas seven individuals were more actively seeking employment. Eight interviews were conducted individually, whereas fourteen interviews were undertaken with a person's employment advisor present, invited by the jobseeker. In three of these interviews, the employment advisor was not disabled, which is indicated in Table B.

The interviews were initially set as individual interviews; however, in the first interviews one employment advisor unintentionally took part in the conversations. She was my contact person and present when I met both jobseekers for the interviews. Her participation was evident, where she asked the jobseekers to clarify their experiences. It is important to say that she did not try to undermine the experience shared, but rather wanted to find out what the jobseeker meant. For instance, in the first interview the jobseeker said that for her a barrier was that she needed more breaks during her part-time work. The employment advisor wanted to find out what she could do to make it easier for her. The jobseeker then explained that she was tired because she was not able to eat breakfast before her work. This helped clarify that the barrier was not the design of the job itself, but the timing of her shift. These two interviews were the only once where I felt an employment advisor influenced to a certain extent the dialogue, but it was the only contribution of this employment advisor.

After these interviews, I reflected on this change within the interview setting. While the main aim of this study was to understand the personal experiences of disabled people with job searches online and questions were directly addressed to job seekers (not employment advisors), I also recognized that disabled jobseekers acknowledged the support that their employment advisors provided to them and that six out of seven employment advisors had personally experienced these social barriers towards disabled people embedded within the labour market. All disabled jobseekers were familiar with their employment advisor, because they have or had received personal employment support. Yet, my priority was to make sure that disabled jobseekers were not undermined by the attendance of employment advisors. Consent in this study was therefore an on-going process, not only to make sure that participants did not feel pressured to take part in it, but also to make sure that they were comfortable with the presence of their employment advisor. Thus, both participants participated voluntarily and were able to leave the interview at any time without giving a reason for it.

Before analysing the findings, it was therefore important to reflect on these interviews with employment advisors present, because it changed the power balance within the interview setting and the way that interviewees talked about their experiences. It clearly had an impact on the way that knowledge was constructed during the interviews, because data was therefore not only shaped by personal experiences of disabled jobseekers, but was likewise based around shared experiences that they encountered when applying for a job with their employment advisors. In some occasions, the employment advisors contributed directly to the knowledge created during the interviews, either to remind the jobseeker about a shared

experience, but also to voice their perceptions and opinions regarding online recruitment and selection practices. In three interviews where a non-disabled employment advisor was present, the employment advisor spoke only out in one interview to state the employer's duty to provide reasonable adjustments and the importance this has for a jobseeker within a job interview.

While I intended to empower disabled jobseekers to discuss their own experience, the presence of an employment advisor might have undermined the full extent to which this was possible, and I recognize that this has influenced the findings of this study. While I acknowledge that some jobseekers might have been more forthcoming to talk about their experiences, because of the employment advisor being present, I also accept that their presence might have hindered them to mention any inequality experienced when receiving this employment support. Yet, referring back to the previous section, all jobseekers took on the employment support services on a voluntary basis, they were not sanctioned or forced into any jobs and were able to withdraw from these support services. This was also evident in the experiences shared with me where some jobseekers mentioned that they had left a placement or voluntary work that they found with help of their employment advisors, because they felt it was not right for them. Besides, in individual interviews with disabled jobseekers none of the participants mentioned any negative experience with their employment advisors.

Within my empirical chapters, the attendance of an employment advisor during the interviews is indicated to acknowledge this dynamic. While most of the disabled jobseekers had received personalised employment support from these two disabled people's organisations, some individuals had not received the same type of support and were more experienced with undertaking job searches and applications themselves. The findings therefore reflect these diverse experiences.

During the interviews, I used feedback loops and gave individuals an opportunity to correct any misinterpretations and to influence the outcome of the dialogue (Kitchin, 2000). This meant that even though the interviews were broadly guided by topics and themes that I identified, research participants were able to share any experience that they felt was important and that I might have otherwise not considered. I made sure that individuals taking part in this research were aware of my intention and I asked my interviewees what they would ask of employers to remove barriers to application. As part of my interview strategy, I asked disabled jobseekers to reflect on their experiences and to share with any feedback that they

had regarding employers. I told them that I would use their feedback (see Appendix F) and communicate it to employers that took part in my research. While I retained control of the questions asked within the research, I made sure that I provided the opportunity to every interviewee to correct misinterpretations and to influence the direction of my research. Over time, I was able to understand general patterns of individuals' stories and to identify collective experiences that individuals shared (Gerson and Horowitz, 2002). The main aim of this study was not to generalise the findings and to focus only on the collective experience of disability. I wanted to give respondents the opportunity to tell their own story, around their own concerns, experiences or perspectives (Miller, 1999), as far as they were willing to share them within the interview setting.

During the interviews with disabled jobseekers, a saturation was reached at the point where I felt additional data would not lead to any new emergent themes (Given, 2016) and the fieldwork was inevitably discontinued. Thus, the main focus of this study was to develop and refine theory, where new theoretical insights are gained from the data. Here saturation focused on the identification of new codes or themes, rather than the completeness of existing theoretical categories, which has been termed 'inductive thematic saturation' according to Saunders et al. (2018: 1896). In this model, saturation is bound to the level of analysis and its association for data collection is at best inherent (Saunders et al. 2018). In this study this entailed to give accounts of personal experiences of disability that individuals with impairments encountered in the labour market and in interaction with organisations, in particular their engagement with the online recruitment process.

The aim of this study was to demonstrate that the same way that disabled jobseekers face structural disablism, they can also experience psycho-emotional disablism in interaction with these structural disablism, during their job searches and applications online. While I could have found more details or variations of personal experiences of disability when continuing the fieldwork, these would have not contributed to further theoretical insights of understanding psycho-emotional disablism. As Reeve has argued in Chapter 2, these experiences can differ for every person and their individual context. Thus additional interviews would have not been able to add different knowledge to understand the extended social model of disability. And therefore this is how this study reached a saturation point, and was able to contribute to new theoretical insights of the lived experiences of disability of individuals with visual impairments and learning difficulties.

## **Interviews with employers**

The second stage of this study was to engage in a dialogue with HR managers or advisors that spoke on behalf of their employer in order to understand their experience with online recruitment and selection practices and whether or not they were aware of any social barriers that disabled people faced during their job searches. I was interested in interviewing organisations that were taking steps towards the inclusion of a diverse group of workers. Company H was able to initiate first contact with organisations and I relied on their assistance to send out emails to their clients, which included documents, written by myself, with detailed information about my research and my contact details (see Appendix C). In this case, I also relied on a self-selection sampling strategy where research participants responded to the email directly to myself or indirectly to Company H that had an interest in the subject and a desire to take part in my research. Therefore, I was not able to have control over who would take part in my interviews. I accepted all respondents that replied to my call, however with one company, the communication was interrupted, and they opted out. In total, I was able to recruit nine HR managers or advisors from within six organisations, including Company H, to take part in my interviews. Some of these organisations had already made progress towards making their recruitment practices more inclusive; others were at the beginning of this process. It is important to acknowledge that data collected would have been different if the sample had included organisations that had not been interested in making any changes to their recruitment and selection practices or if they did not use the services provided by Company H.

Simultaneously, I had a dialogue with my contact persons in the disabled people's organisations and it was decided to include them in my employer interviews. I therefore undertook two more interviews with HR managers and the Deputy Chief Executive in both disabled people's organisations, who were able to share knowledge on how they undertook their recruitment and selection practices based on the social model of disability.

In total, I undertook twelve semi-structured interviews (between 43 and 75 minutes) with HR managers and employers of eight small to medium size organisations within the public, professional and non-profit sector. Before the interviews started, time was spent to talk through the information sheet and the consent form, which took place between 5 and 10 minutes. This part of the interview was not recorded.

All interviews took part at the offices of organisations in the South, Midlands and North of England. Eight of them were individual interviews, which lasted between 43 and 65 minutes.

Whereas two interviews consisted of two research participants taking part in the discussion simultaneously and these took over 70 minutes. In this study these are counted as double interviews (see Table C). Some interviewees also shared with me that they had an impairment and made reference to their personal experience of disability. Interviews were semi-structured and were broadly guided by topics and themes that I identified and that had been raised by jobseekers in the interviews (see Appendix E), but there was scope to expand on any other issues that individuals wanted to share with me during the interviews. The format of the interviews was based on a conversation as long as I was able to ensure that all topics of interest were studied. The particular points covered during the conversation helped to identify 8 themes: (1) individuals job roles and experiences of working with disabled employees (2) their general opinions concerning barriers that disabled people face in the labour market (3) how they define disability (4) the ways their recruitment and selection practices are designed (5) their perceptions of the online recruitment process and whether it is accessible for disabled people (6) whether they thought that the online recruitment practices that they had adopted were inclusive for disabled people (7) any government support that they had used to support the employment of disabled people (8) any recommendations that they had for other employers to make their recruitment process more accessible.

During the interviews, I shared the feedback from my interviews with disabled jobseekers with employers (see Appendix F). This feedback entailed recommendations and suggestions that disabled jobseekers wanted to tell employers in order to remove social barriers during recruitment and selection. I used this as a way of incorporating the multiple voices of disabled jobseekers within employer interviews and to explore experiences of disability inequality that individuals had faced during their job searches. The aim of these interviews with HR managers and advisors was to understand whether those involved in designing and implementing recruitment strategies' aware of disability inequality within organisations practices and how recruitment and selection practices were influenced by legal and technological developments.

I stopped undertaking interviews with employers when I felt that no new experiences and messages were captured, which were able to provide new theoretical insights to understand online recruitment as a social process and the way that ableist norms are embedded within the design of recruitment practices. The aim of this study was not to learn more details about the examples of online recruitment practices adopted within each organisation, but to show that the online recruitment process can be disabling for individuals with impairments,



because it is built around taken for granted ableist norms. Thus, a saturation was reached at the point where additional data would not have led to any new emergent themes (Given, 2016). And therefore this is how this study has contributed to new theoretical insights about the online recruitment process as social or relational process, where power relationships between individuals and the recruiting organisations are established that underpin the way online recruitment practices are designed.

Overall, I collected 34 semi-structured qualitative interviews over a 12-month period (2014-2015) with disabled jobseekers (individuals with visual impairments (VI) and individuals with learning difficulties (LD), employment advisors and employers (see Table 1, 2 and 3).

**Table 1: Interviews with disabled participants & employment advisors in company D – use of pseudonyms**

Date	Duration in minutes	Age	Impairment as described by participants	Employment status (V: Volunteer, PT: Part-time)	Participant	Employment Advisor
02.06.14	20	20s	LD	V- hospital	Anna	Annabeth
02.06.14	33	20s	LD/VI	V-charity	Bethany	Annabeth
03.06.14	20	20s	LD	PT- café	Claire	Diana
03.06.14	20	30s	VI	PT-employment adviser	Diana	-
16.06.14	33	40s	Hearing impairment /LD	PT-floor cleaner	Edward	Annabeth
10.07.14	20	20s	LD	Job search	Franziska	Claudette
10.07.14	32	20s	LD/Epilepsy	Job search	Georgia	Dan
15.07.14	22	20s	Dyslexia	Job search	Henry	Dan
06.08.14	22	20s	LD	Job search	Ian	Ethan
12.08.14	20	20s	LD	PT—care taker	Jack	Claudette
01.09.14	50	40s	Asperger	V – museum	Kay	Florence
05.09.14	30	40s	Speech, epilepsy, LD	V-charity shop/ Giants	Liam	Florence

**Table 2 Interviews with disabled participants & employment advisors in company E – use of pseudonyms**

Date	Duration in minutes	Age	Impairment as described by participants	Employment status (V: Volunteer, PT: Part-time)	Participant	Employment Advisor
28.10.14	20	20s	VI	V – action for blind	Morgan	-
28.10.14	20	20s	VI	Job Search	Nigel	Gabriel * non-disabled
19.11.14	22	40s	VI	V- blind/conservation charity	Oliver	Gabriel * non-disabled
07.01.15	37	50s	VI	Job Search	Patricia	-
21.01.15	34	40s	VI	V	Quinn	-
28.01.15	54	40s	VI	V – paperwork's	Robert	-
03.03.15	33	40s	VI	PT-Work Viewpoint	Stephanie	-
03.03.15	28	60s	VI	PT-Work-Viewpoint	Tessa	-
31.03.15	36	30s	VI	V – radio, children	Ulrich	Gabriel * non-disabled
13.08.15	33	50s	VI	Job search	Vincent	-

**Table 3 Interviews with employers – use of pseudonyms**

Date	Duration in minutes	Sector	Size	Company	Participants
25.11.14	50	Private	Medium	Company A	Andrew
25.11.14	43	Private	Medium		Brigitte
25.11.14	47	Private	Medium		Christian
29.11.14	43	Private	Medium	Company B	Dorothy
05.12.14	75	Private	Medium	Company C	Elisabeth Fiona
15.12.14	65	Non-profit	Small	Company D	Greg
15.01.15	70	Non-profit	Medium	Company E	Hanna Isabel
02.02.15	55	Private	Medium	Company F	Joanne

02.02.15	64	Private	Medium	Company G	Kevin
09.03.15	50	Private	Small	Company H	Lara

### **‘Making convincing arguments’ and data analysis**

Adopting an emancipatory research design had an impact on the way I identified ‘convincing arguments’ and in what manner data was used to construct and present analytical explanations (Mason, 2002). As Mason (2002) notes qualitative researchers should direct their efforts towards the making of arguments. By this, she means the construction of a perspective, an interpretation, or a line of reasoning or analysis. This making of arguments has been a process, where I constantly had to reflect about and engaged on the data, but also with those to whom I wanted to present my arguments, as well as, certainly, the grounds on which I believe the arguments stand (Mason 2002). Thus, when arguing reflexively I had the responsibility to be aware of a meaningful range of perspectives, experiences and standpoints, including that of my own. It was significant that the data analysed represented clearly the voices of participants. Adopting this reflexive approach enabled me to show sensitivity to the variety of interpretations and voices in the data, and my willingness to analyse and question my own accounts, but also that of others, without misrepresenting their stories (Mason, 2002).

One of the most common ways of analysing qualitative data is through conducting a thematic analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2015). This technique is used to bring to light the meaning, richness and magnitude of the subjective experience of social life (Atheide and Johnson, 1994). Following the transcription of the interviews and reading through them, I was able to identify recurring themes concerning the social barriers that individuals had encountered throughout their job searches and job applications and that are embedded within online recruitment and selection practices.

Themes emerged in the first analysis around access to the Internet or computers and the one-size fits all application process. This iterative process lead to a second analysis and another theme emerged around the notion of the ideal worker and productivity. These themes have shaped the empirical chapters of this thesis.

I coded the data in line with social barriers identifiable within the experiences of disability (structural and psycho-emotional disablism) mentioned by participants. The concept of

inequality regimes and the ideal worker have been used in the second analysis to identify ableist norms embedded within organisations and in the online recruitment process. Disabled jobseekers opened up about negative encounters that they had with past employers or co-workers, the use of the library or the Jobcentre and the inaccessibility and usability of online recruitment processes. These experiences (predominately negative) that jobseekers brought with themselves to the recruitment process had an impact on their experiences and engagement with job seeking and applications and whether or not they would be open to declare their disability (in line with the Equality Act 2010 definition) to the employer. Throughout the interviews, we both identified these experiences as disabling. I rearranged important segments of the transcripts under each emerging theme. This helped me to recognise similarities or dissimilarities between the experiences of participants that they shared with me during the interviews. The last step of this process was to select quotes from the transcripts that articulated many of the common arguments made. As part of this emancipatory research project I wanted to make sure that the voices of all my research participants were heard. I therefore used quotes throughout the analysis to demonstrate the way arguments were articulated. I acknowledge that it was up to me to abstract from this raw data and the quotes are used as illustrations. Even though it was my choice to select the quotes used within my empirical chapters, I ensured to use quotes from every participant throughout my writing or referred to individuals in parts where participants had similar or dissimilar views with each other. Some quotes have been slightly amended to fill in any gaps on the transcripts by using square brackets and to make sure that the overall messages intended by research subjects were conveyed. However, I made sure that the voices represented belonged to the participants and when uncertain I left a space within the quotes to not misinterpret their explanations.

### **Limitations**

It is important to reflect on three limitations in more detail that might have undervalued the findings of my research. As part of my study, I chose to undertake an emancipatory approach to research and to collaborate with two disabled people's organisations throughout the fieldwork. Due to the nature of the employment support provided by both disabled people's organisations, the sample size of jobseekers recruited for this study was small. This can be seen as the first limitation in that the findings of this study are only based on a small group of jobseekers, rather than a larger sample.

Moreover, the lengths of interviews can be viewed as a second limitation, with almost half of the interviews only lasting around 20 minutes to half an hour. Some scholars might criticise the duration of the interviews in that it is not enough to fully capture experiences of disability. However, as stated above, there are three reasons for these shorter interviews: First, some jobseekers were less frank and detailed when they talked about any discrimination experienced and barriers encountered. Second, a number of individuals had spent less time in the labour market and within work. And third, the sample consisted of ten younger jobseekers who had graduated from secondary school or college in the last years and had therefore fewer experience of engaging with job search activities. It was important for me to capture a variety of experiences of disability encountered regardless of the time that individuals had spent within the labour market to demonstrate that the changes from traditional to online recruitment had further excluded disabled people from finding employment. The aim was to demonstrate in what way the labour market, interactions with employers and the online recruitment process can be disabling for individuals with learning difficulties and for individuals with visual impairments.

In this PhD project, I undertook the fieldwork myself, rather than working with a disabled co-researcher. This can be viewed as a third and last limitation. For some scholars within the field of disability studies this is not a valid approach to disability research. While I made sure that research participants were given opportunity to correct any misinterpretations in order to have some influence on the direction of my research, I have retained control of the funding, the research design and the data analysis. This study was informed by emancipatory principles of disability research, but I do not claim to have been successful in achieving a 'truly emancipatory research' to adhere to all six core principles of emancipatory research (see, Stone and Priestley, 1996) approach and recognise the methodological limitations. In any future research project, I would like to work more closely with disabled people's organisations and to collaborate with disabled co-researchers in order to remove this limitation.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined the reasons for adopting an emancipatory approach in this thesis. In adopting an emancipatory and critical approach, the study has rejected the belief that the social world can be studied in the same objective way as the natural world by the use of quantitative methods (Oliver, 1992). Thus, the research outcomes are influenced by the subjectivity of the researcher and her mode of engagement that leads to the production

of a variety of versions of an independently existing reality that one never fully knows (Symon and Cassell, 2012). The methodological nature of study has been qualitative and was based on a dialogue between the researcher and the participants of this study.

Epistemic reflexivity in this research has been very important and has both enabled the construction of new interpretations and the achievement of consensus between participants and researcher. Reflexivity includes both an openness and honesty about our own position, to show respect to interviewees multiple experiences shared in the research and thus engage in a thoughtful reflection on our responsibility as researchers (Mackenzie Davey and Liefoghe, 2004). The importance here is to recognise the multiple voices and perspectives that emerge during the fieldwork and a need for the researcher to deconstruct her accounts.

For that reason, the priority as a non-disabled researcher within this field has been on the social model with a clear political commitment. The subjectivity of this research is inevitable and is embraced by the research tool kit, with reflexivity used as a means to recognise the potential influence such political commitments may have on the conduct of research and the interpretation of data.

I have adopted the use of non-exploitive research methods that include semi-structured interviews and discovered findings that help to counter exclusion and challenge disability inequality. The aim of this study was to identify barriers and to represent genuinely the experiences of disabled people (Shakespeare, 1996) by arguing that disability inequality within the online recruitment process has to be challenged by removing social and structural barriers that disable individuals with impairments in their job searches. This study was led by disabled people and the disability studies literature rather than the recruitment literature this had helped to discover these deeper experiences of disablement that jobseekers had experienced in form of direct and indirect psycho-emotional disablism. The following chapters document the study by representing data from the interviews conducted with disabled jobseekers, employment advisors and employers. The next chapters are guided by themes identified in this study through interviews and collaboration between the researcher and research participants.

## **Chapter 5: Disability inequality: personal experiences of disability**

This chapter aims to address the first research question, which asked how is disability experienced by people with impairments in the labour market and in interaction with organisations? The purpose of this chapter is to provide insights into personal experiences of disability, in form of direct psycho-emotional disablism, experienced by jobseekers with visual impairments and/or learning difficulties to show that past experiences that individuals bring to the recruitment process with employers or colleagues can impact on their decision to declare their disability (in line with the Equality Act 2010 definition) on the job application. Direct psycho-emotional disablism can arise because of ‘acts of invalidation’ through actions from relationships that a disabled person has with employers or colleagues, or from the relationship that a disabled person has with themselves, which can be a real barrier during job searches (Reeve, 2014). These personal experiences of disability are sustained through imagery, cultural representation and actions and can maintain disability inequality, as effectively as public experiences of disability, such as structural disablism. This chapter acknowledges that there are different forms of psycho-emotional disablism and that it might therefore be difficult to untangle them completely from the experiences of impairment and structural disablism (Reeve, 2014). While, the experiences of disabled people shared in this research were unique, some common themes emerged. The stories shared in the process of the research include primarily the perspectives of disabled jobseekers, but also of employment advisors from two disabled people’s organisations, who have worked closely with the disabled jobseekers, and perceptions of employers, who have tried to implement recruitment practices that are more inclusive but to various degrees of depth.

This chapter begins by demonstrating that jobseekers had adopted ableist norms of the ideal worker embedded in society and the labour market. This led to experiences of internalised ableism for some individuals, because they sustained a medicalised view of disability and saw their impairment as their individual barrier to work and believed that they were less productive compared to no-disabled workers. Consequently, some jobseekers engaged in ‘passing’ by hiding their impairments in order to escape dealing with the reactions of employers that might hinder them in gaining employment. Likewise, disabled people also shared their experiences of direct psycho-emotional disablism through social relationships with past employers and colleagues, which had impacted on their view of self as a worker and changed their personal strategies of undertaking job searches.

These personal experiences of disability that disabled jobseekers had through social relations with past employers, but also with themselves had directly influenced a person's decision of disclosure. That is to inform the employer about an impairment. This process of declaring an impairment on the job application is used in this chapter as an illustration of the existence of power imbalances between disabled jobseekers and employers, but these power imbalances also indirectly manifest within the employment support provided to disabled jobseekers by their employment advisors, which may reinstate rather than undermine disability inequality (in form of social barriers), experienced within the labour market.

### **View of self as a worker**

This section begins by reflecting on experiences of direct psycho-emotional disablism, which can arise in the relationship that a disabled person has with themselves. It highlights that jobseekers can experience social barriers that erect 'restrictions' within them and limit their psycho-emotional wellbeing by feeling 'hurt' because of discriminatory reactions and behaviour of non-disabled people, which make them feel 'worthless' or of lesser value. These experiences can lead to instances of 'internalised ableism', which is a form of disablism whereby an individual internalises the prejudices held by the dominant group, and therefore essentially though subconsciously 'invalidate themselves' as 'other' in order to fit into this ableist society (Campbell, 2008; Reeve, 2012). This experience of internalised ableism that some individuals experienced because of their impairments would not exist without society's negated view of disabled people and their abilities. Thus, experiences of internalised ableism are purely social in origin.

The narratives of disabled people presented in this study describe how individuals shared their personal experiences of disability and that these stories told by respondents were unique in relation to their own particular context and form of impairment. In this study, more than half of the participants were born with impairments, as to the remainder of individuals who acquired their impairments during their adult life, whilst being in employment.

When asked about their barriers to work, the majority of disabled people that took part in this study referred to an impairment as their individual barriers. Personal stories revealed that individuals believe that the barriers to get a job were inside them and directly linked to their impairments. Their interpretations are in line with the medical model of disability that views disability as the inevitable product of an individual's impairment (Oliver, 1990). It is important to reflect on these personal experiences of disability shared by jobseekers in



particular the relationship that a disabled person had with himself or herself. Depending on whether the individual was born with their impairments or had acquired their impairment during their adult life, their views of self as a worker was different, which was shaped by their individualised experiences of disability.

### **Adopting ableist norms**

Individuals who were born with their impairments opened up about developing personal strategies in order to meet the normative expectations formed around the assumed ideal (non-disabled) worker (Harlan and Robert, 1998; Foster and Wass, 2013; Williams and Mavin, 2015) and to challenge what they thought were their individual barriers to work. For some jobseekers, this meant that they engaged in ways to improve an impairment, by striving to become the able-bodied norm embedded within society, because it views disability inherently as something negative (Campbell, 2008). For example, Henry, who was in his 20s, had finished secondary school and had been seeking for mechanic and warehouse jobs for the last 18 months, said that:

‘I think it is just my dyslexia that might be holding me back [from being hired]. But I am trying to improve it.’ (Henry, Jobseeker, interviewed with Dan, 15.07.2014)

He made a clear indication that the reason for not getting a job was directly linked to his impairment. His interpretation is underpinned by the medical model of disability perspective that views disability as situated within the individual rather than within society. Thus, he developed a personal strategy to meet the normative expectations formed around the assumed ideal worker, by attempting to overcome his impairment, rather than to consider that the barrier was related to the unwillingness of employers to accommodate his individual difference.

Other participants revealed that they had worked in different jobs, but not informed their employer about their impairment. Thus, they had participated in an act of ‘passing’ by concealing their impairment to avoid dealing with oppressive reactions and stigma by employers that they felt would restrict their employment opportunities (Brune, and Wilson, 2013). This was noticeable in the account shared by Tessa, who was in her 50s and was working for a disabled people’s organisation. She reflected on her personal strategy of passing where she concealed her visual impairment, because she believed that it was her only option to find a job in the past.

'I worked all the way from being a hairdresser without telling anyone. I worked 13 years like that, which is why I decided to leave, because it just got so much of a strain. It is very nerve racking, you live on a knife-edge, you just, and you don't want anyone to find out. Very worrying a lot of times, you got very good at pretending and acting about I suppose really. But it was just the only way back then that I could get a position.' (Tessa, Employee, 03.03.2015)

Her story demonstrates that engaging in this behaviour was useful to ease the strain of social relations with others that were disabling. While she could evidently do the job, she believed that others might think that a person with a visual impairment could not work as a hairdresser. However, engaging in this act of passing led to difficulties for Tessa personally, because she felt always at risk of being exposed. Within the literature, passing is continually viewed as something negative, by rejecting a disabled identity, but it is important to acknowledge that passing can merely be an attempt for disabled people to reduce their experience of direct psycho-emotional disablism in certain social encounters (Reeve, 2014).

These stories show that disabled people had adopted ableist norms, which demonstrate their experiences of internalised ableism, in an effort or desire to be accepted as equal, as non-disabled worker. Individuals demonstrated that disability was something inferior that should be at best overcome. This meant that some jobseekers tried to improve their impairments in order to fit into the accepted norm, others engaged in ways of 'passing' by concealing their impairment to employers to ease their experiences of direct psycho-emotional disablism.

### **Accepting individual responsibility for lower productivity**

During the interviews, it became apparent that for individuals who acquired their impairments later in life, their view of self as a worker shifted. This was evident when individuals reflected on their ability as a worker now, which clashed with the metaphoric ideal type version that they had of themselves prior to becoming disabled. Stories show that participants had faced challenges, because they moved from the included to the excluded group within society (exclusion as basis of disability) and might have had to overcome their own prejudice about disability (Reeve, 2012). Participants were open to talk about these personal experiences and said that they lost their self-confidence during this time in their lives and struggled to make sense of this new identity, which had changed their perceptions about their abilities, and also what they thought they were able to do as a worker.

For instance, Oliver, who was in his 40s and has been unemployed over 2 years, shared his experience of acquiring his visual impairment 12 years ago and how it impacted on his self-esteem and his view of himself as a worker.

‘I think it was a mixture of things, I already had quite low self-esteem, things that happened before that. I did not really have much confidence that I can find work or hold it down once I got it. Once I go the sight loss, then it was worse. I did not really think I would every get a job...[I felt] more like I did not have the skills or ability to do the kind of jobs I wanted to do and it [impairment] changed what I thought I can do as well.’ (Oliver, Volunteer interviewed with Gabriel, 19.11.14)

Oliver explained that he did not only feel his self-esteem was affected by the changes, but he also believed that his abilities and skills were not suited anymore for the jobs he wanted to do prior to acquiring an impairment. This experience impacted on his psycho-emotional wellbeing and he felt it was his main barrier to find employment in the current labour market.

A similar experience was shared by Stephanie. She explained that when she lost her sight in her early 40s she remained in her job as travel agent for three more years and she felt that her boss ‘did everything to sustain’ her employment, as she phrased it. This included working with Access to Work to make her working environment more accessible; nevertheless, she described how she found it difficult to do the job. Stephanie explained that part of her ‘unwritten’ job role was to make eye contact with clients, but that she no longer felt confident to do this. While this might be one way of building a relationship of trust, maintaining rapport with customers could be achieved in diverse ways. She lost confidence in herself during this period. She said that she felt uncomfortable in keeping the job that she had done as a non-disabled person. Likewise, she also mentioned that she had a divorce during this time and became a single parent. This put additional pressure on her, irrespective of changes at work, which left her feeling depressed. Thus, she eventually resigned.

‘One of the reasons why I left [was] because I felt that I was taking a wage I was not earning. And I just felt guilty for doing that.... It wasn't really [my employer]. It was personal, it was just me personally that I didn't feel, I didn't feel the confidence to go and do work.’ (Stephanie, Employee, 03.03.2015)

This insight showed that Stephanie was comparing her ability now to a metaphoric ideal type version of herself. Her experience of internalised ableism left Stephanie questioning her ability and confidence based on the socially accepted qualities and behaviour of what she believed was an ideal worker embedded within organisations. This was indicative when she

referred to the importance of looking customers in the eyes as a quality that a travel consultant should have in order to build rapport. She felt that not being able to make eye contact and to act accordingly was her personal responsibility. In fact, she first thought about how it could have a substantial impact on her employer, before she considered what the impact of leaving the job could have on herself by becoming unemployed. Stephanie's experience demonstrated that she felt personally unable to do her job because she believed not to fit into this ideal worker norm (Harpur, 2009; Foster and Wass, 2013), around which jobs are designed in organisations. In order to challenge the job design, her employer could have analysed the job tasks with Stephanie, which she did not feel comfortable with and offered alternative ways of building rapport with clients.

Other jobseekers, that had adopted these ableist norms opened up about their ways of easing their personal experiences with direct psycho-emotional disablism. For example, there was Patricia, who was in her late 50s, now unemployed for 6 months, and who had developed her visual impairment over twenty years ago. She explained that she told her last employer to pay her less compared to her non-disabled colleagues, because she felt a loss of confidence and the pressure of others judging her performance level on the job.

'I do have an issue with that thing, disabled people being equal... there is no way you can do the same service as a sighted person, I don't think you are worth that much per hour... Everything I do is taking me longer... I think it would be fair to pay a visual impaired person less, because they are slower at their job... I've got to get my employer pay me less.' (Patricia, Jobseeker, 07.01.2015)

Patricia, made a reference to being 'not worth' the same as a non-disabled employee, which she intrinsically linked with being disabled. Her experience highlights that the embedded nature of ideal qualities and behaviour within the workplace can have a direct impact on disabled people. Likewise, she acknowledged that she was less productive and slower compared to her non-disabled colleagues and asked her employer to pay her less to ease her stress levels. While her strategy might have helped her personally to reduce experiences of psycho-emotional disablism at the time, her behaviour reinforced, rather than undermined a perceived stigma attached to the attributes of disabled people by indicating that disabled workers should be paid less, because they thought to be worth less than non-disabled employees.

The narratives of disabled jobseekers that acquired their impairments later in life opposed the stories shared by Jammaers et al (2016), where disabled workers contested the ableist

discourse that defined them as less productive. In their research, Jammaers et al. (2016) revealed that disabled workers were able to craft positive identities by redefining productivity and they refused their individual responsibility for lower productivity. The private stories shared by jobseekers in this study however show that more than half of jobseekers accepted their individual responsibility for their lower productivity. This was evident for five out of nine individuals, whereas four interviewees said that if they would receive the right equipment from the employer, they could do most jobs, although not as fast when compared to a non-disabled person.

Findings suggest that most disabled jobseekers adopted ableist norms embedded within society and the labour market, which has led to experiences of internalised ableism. Thus, some individuals engaged in behaviour of fitting in to meet the normative expectations formed around the ideal worker or individuals accepted that they are less productive by adopting ableist norms. Not only was this medicalised view of disability reflected in the ways that jobseekers viewed themselves as a worker, but it was also manifested in the perspective that employer's shared within this study of what they personally or their organisations believed constitutes disability, which is discussed in the next section

### **Understanding of disability in organisations**

While all employers taking part in this study showed a genuine interest in equalitarian goals by removing inequality within their recruitment and selection practices, most individuals with responsibility for human resource management adopted a view of disability underpinned by the medical model of disability. For instance, Joanne working for Company F said that disability was something that hinders a person to do a job:

‘And this is purely my definition. My own words it would be, a disability, I would see as something that means that you would not be able to do the same job just like everybody else. I mean everyone is different, but you would need some form or something different to enable you to do that job.’ (Joanne, Company F, 02.02.2015)

While Joanne made a reference to the fact that every person is different, disability however is something that could stop a person from doing the job and that person needs an adjustment to enable him or her to do the job. In fact, she is clearly ‘othering’ individuals with impairments in that disability makes a person different compared to people without that impairment (Oliver, 2004; Campbell, 2009). Her medicalised perspective describes disability as an individual problem and she suggested that the individual is not able to perform to the

same standard as an able-bodied employee without the adjustment. Her view however ignores that jobs are socially constructed around assumed ideal qualities and behaviour that a worker should have, inevitably creating a mismatch between the job description and a disabled person. (Acker, 1990). When organisations adopt this perspective, it might hinder the removal of barriers to equality in organisations, because it perceives disabled people as ‘other’, and does not question the socially constructed nature of work (Campbell, 2009; Alvesson and Willmott, 1992).

Some other employer respondents referred to anti-discrimination legislation such as the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 or the current Equality Act (EA) 2010, articulating a more legal definition of disability. As Chapter 3 noted, these equality laws were designed to tackle disability inequality in the employment context, however they have faced criticism by disabled people and their organisations because disability is also defined on medicalised terms (Barnes, 2000; Lawson, 2011). The legal definition, seen as accurate by employers, legalises society’s subordinate view of disability and demonstrates that there is a difference in the attributes between non-disabled and disabled people. For instance, Elisabeth working for Company C said that:

‘We probably draw on the legal definition, disability has a long term adverse impact on your day to day activities than it is going to be a disability... but you can’t see them all [disabilities]... I think a lot of people with mental disabilities don’t necessarily recognise that they have a mental disability. Sometimes it is not until issues arise in the workplace that you become aware of it. And this is how we generally become aware of it. So they will never going to declare it, because they don’t recognise that they got it themselves.’ (Elisabeth, Company C, interviewed with Fiona 05.12.2014)

While Elisabeth made an assumption that the organisation adopts the legal definition of disability, she uses the term disabilities, rather than what this thesis refers to as impairment or ‘impairment effects’ see Chapter 2 (Thomas, 1999). Elisabeth explained that Company C (her employer) was sometimes only made aware of any impairment that an employee had, once individuals had encountered barriers in the workplace. Based on her experience not every person might be conscious that they have an impairment. However, another reading perhaps indicates that employees do not feel confident to declare that they have an impairment to the employer, because they fear discrimination due to the stigma associated with disability or that they would lose their job. It appears that she is attributing organisational blind spots to individuals themselves, in that the individuals have to experience any organisational barriers first, for instance, individuals might be unable to perform their

day to day work tasks, before the organisation is willing to acknowledge that their organisational practices maintain the existence of disability inequality.

However, not all employers taking part in this study defined disability solely based on this medical definition. Both disabled people's organisations, Company D and Company E, which have implemented the social model of disability perspective within their organisational practices, challenged this medical model of disability perspective that employers, but also disabled jobseekers had adopted. They clarified that the medical model devalues the ability of a disabled person by locating the problem of disability within the individual, as individual barrier, rather than as a consequence of an ableist society that is responsible for creating social barriers for disabled people.

For instance, Greg, working for Company D, explained why non-disabled people, but also disabled people, might view their impairments as a barrier to employment. He highlighted that:

‘The predominant barrier is around attitudes of non-disabled people and sometimes among disabled people themselves... generally the negative attitudes and stereotypes that people in society including employers and people in organisations have about the ability, their perceived perceptions of the ability of disabled people. Which is generally focused on what disabled people can't do, because of a condition or impairment, rather than what they could do if they had the appropriate support.’  
(Greg, Company D, 15.12.2014)

He referred to the fact that most employers adopt the stigmatised view of disability that a person would be less able to do certain tasks, which leads to disability inequality within organisations. His perception feeds in to experiences presented by disabled jobseekers and the way they questioned their ability to undertake productive work. Greg tries to challenge these ableist norms embedded within organisations that recognise that only a specific type of person can undertake a certain job. He underlined that organisational practices should concentrate more on what the individual could do and bring to the organisation, if they have the right support and reasonable adjustments in place. Along with the view of disabled jobseekers, his assessment highlighted the socially constructed nature of work that is based on ableist norms and the socially accepted ideas of ‘ideal qualities and behaviour ‘that a worker should have (Granberg, 2016). Consequently, this can lead to barriers that disabled people face when they apply for jobs, because it is believed that they do not match the ideal worker norm and disability as implicit selection criteria might directly or indirectly impact on the job outcome.

From the stories told what seems to be apparent is the fact that two third of employers within this study predominately adopt the medical view of disability, which maintains that disabled people are less able to do productive work. Even though participants were positive about employing disabled people, their adoption of the Equality Act 2010 definition inevitably reinstates this medicalised standpoint of disability that is deeply embedded within society and the labour market. Employer's might therefore reinstate rather than undermine disability inequality within UK organisations when adopting a legislative view of disability, because it focuses on undervaluing individual's attributes, rather than on challenging ableist norms embedded within organisational practices.

The next section investigates the ways in which direct social relations with past employers were real social barriers for disabled people during their job searches and gave rise to personal experiences of disability.

### **Social relationships with past employers**

The stories shared by disabled people not only highlighted that individuals perceived their impairments as barriers to work, but also and more predominantly that social relationships with past employers had contributed to instances of disability inequality and direct psycho-emotional disablism. During the course of the interviews, disabled jobseekers opened up about personal experiences of disability, in form of discriminatory behaviour and stigma, with past employers that had directly impacted on their perception of themselves and employers, and had changed their personal strategies of searching for a job over the years.

Some participants explained that they had faced unanticipated or sudden changes to their job design and routine, even though their employers were aware of their impairments. These changes inevitably excluded them from undertaking their everyday work, and individuals were willing to leave their paid employment due to increasing experiences of psycho-emotional disablism. This was evident in Patricia's account, who was in her 60s and acquired her visual impairment when she was 30 years old. She had a master's degree in genetics and had been studying for a PhD, however she did not complete it due to personal reasons. She had been working as personal assistant for many years, however half a year ago she left her job earlier than she had expected.

‘There was no real process of me leaving. And they were very relieved that I said yes, because I could have said no. They had changed the conditions of working that didn't suit me at all... which is why I ended up being unable to do the job... I have been very



nervous about getting another job. I am not sure I can cope with that.’ (Patricia, Jobseeker, 07.01.2015)

Without doubt, her story displays the social relationship that Patricia had with her past employer was disabling and led to experiences of direct psycho-emotional disablism within the workplace. She explained that from offering flexible working hours, she was put onto fixed hours and she was unable to finish her work tasks on time. The actions of her employer to change the conditions of her job without consulting her can be viewed as an indirect account of disability discrimination. While she would have been able to challenge this discriminatory behaviour under the Equality Act 2010, she decided to take voluntary redundancy. Not only had this experience of direct psycho-emotional disablism impacted on her wellbeing and influenced her decision to leave her job, but it had also shifted her view of work and she was now more hesitant of trusting other employers.

In a different vein, some encounters of social relations with employers were challenged under the equality law. Jobseekers shared cases where they had chosen to take legal actions against their past employer, because of unfair treatment. This was evident for Ulrich, who had a visual impairment, was in his 40s and had been out of work for 14 years.

‘It did not work out really [working for a charity], because the job that I was doing and the job they were having me doing were two completely different entities... They had no equipment... They were messing me around with pay... when I actually quit I had to basically threaten them with legal action...So, it wasn't really a good experience, which is why I have never really accepted another job working for another charity. It is all going good volunteering for a charity. At the end of the day, I know what happened last time and I kind of go by the phrase, once bitten, twice shy.’ (Ulrich, Volunteer, interviewed with Gabriel, 31.03.2015)

For Ulrich the discriminatory behaviour encountered by his past employer and the disabling working environment made him feel of ‘lesser value’ and had impacted on his attitude of working for other charity organisations. Although he has been undertaking voluntary work for a charity for over 6 years where he supports blind children in schools, he felt restricted to accept a paid position due to his distressing experience of discrimination in the past. His story shows that just one invalidating experience with an employer can foster continuing mistrust towards other employers, which can have direct implications on an individual’s job search strategy.

When interviewees were asked whether they felt that society had been changing over the years and becoming more inclusive and aware of disability inequality, some individuals said that discrimination towards disabled people had become less visible, whereas others perceived that it was still persistent and affected their employment opportunities in the labour market. As Kay, who had a learning difficulty, is 46, had a bachelor's degree in history and had been unemployed for over 20 years, explained: employers are able to hire whom they like, but it should be a priority to make sure that people are safe and not ill-treated. Talking from experience, he explained that employers only give jobs to disabled people that offer low wages and inflexible hours, which leave them at a significant social disadvantage.

‘Too many employers get away with treating people like dirt, because they know you will not challenge them. Others, [think] ‘you are disabled, [ok we will] take you on’, [but this just] leads to minimum wage. They know I would take twice as long, so they would pay me less. There is stigma in British society on disabled people.’ (Kay, Volunteer, interviewed with Florence, 01.09.2014)

His view suggested that inferior jobs are created for disabled people, because employers assume that they would take longer to undertake certain job tasks and should therefore get paid less. Kay did not deny that he would take longer at work. However, he questioned the way that employers adopt these ableist norms embedded within society that lead to disability inequality in organisations, which can have a direct impact on individuals' employment opportunities within the labour market. These social relations that disabled jobseekers shared with past employers had impacted on their personal wellbeing and their views and mistrust towards employers in general within the labour market.

From the above, one can comprehend that the personal experiences of disability that disabled people had with employers, but also with themselves, subconsciously shaped their views of self as a worker and had impact on their personal strategies of searching for a job over the years. In fact, these past experiences of disability inequality have steered a jobseekers' decision of declaring a disability to an employer. The process of declaring is used in this next section to illustrate the power imbalances that exist predominately between employers and disabled jobseekers, but also indirectly between disabled jobseekers and their employment advisors. Moreover, it demonstrates that the psychometric approach and equal treatment approach to equality might lead to a dilemma for disabled jobseeker within this process, because most individuals require a reasonable adjustment in the recruitment process, that requires differential treatment, and therefore have to disclosure their impairment.

## **Disclosing an impairment on job applications – personal choice or obligation?**

During the interviews, disabled participants were asked whether or not they were comfortable in declaring their disability (here, disability refers to the Equality Act 2010 definition, see Chapter 3) during the recruitment and selection process. It is important to mention that in the UK it is not a legal requirement for jobseekers to disclose that they are disabled to employers. All jobseekers highlighted incidences where they were asked a pre-employment health question on the job application. This study did not intentionally investigate whether these questions asked on job applications were related to the exemptions covered by the Equality Act 2010 or potentially prohibited under Section 60 (see Chapter 3). The aim of this section is to explore the process of declaring from the views of disabled jobseekers, which demonstrates that individuals generally felt that declaring that they had an impairment could have a negative impact on whether or not they were invited to a job interview.

Most jobseekers expressed strong opinions about their personal choice of disclosing and said that it was important to build trust between employers and themselves. They voiced that there was no purpose in being insincere to employers, because they would eventually find out about their impairment. Liam, who had learning difficulties and was in his 40s, supported this claim. He explained that he lost his job as press operator 20 years ago due to having too many epileptic fits at work. Since then, he has been trying to get back into work and felt the need to be forthcoming and declare his disability to the employer and in his job application.

‘I have to [tell the employer that I am disabled]. If I tell them first, they will hopefully say ‘you told me the truth. I will give you a go.’ (Liam, Volunteer, interviewed with Florence, 05.09.2014)

His strategy of disclosure was underpinned by his perception that telling the employer was a way to gain trust and show that he was confident that he could do the job. He felt that by building a trustworthy relationship between the employer and himself, it could lead to a more proactive discussion with an employer on how he would do the job once selected for an interview. Nevertheless, his story shows that his strategy for disclosure had not been successful to get him into employment.

In a similar vein, there was a general agreement from jobseekers that some employers might become wary upon finding out that an individual had declared his or her impairment on the job application form. For instance, Vincent who was in his 50s and had a visual impairment.

He lost his temporary job as service centre administrator three months ago because he did not pass probation. He explained that:

‘Once they find out, because you have to reveal it at some stage that you have a sight problem, you can’t withhold that information. It is neither in your interest nor in the employer interest [to conceal your impairment] due to a number of reasons... [One reason is] because there is nothing worse than going to an interview having to do a pre-test and if information is not in an accessible format you set yourself up to fail there for a start... [But] once they [employers] find out, I kind of think that it frightens them off.’ (Vincent, Jobseeker, 13.08.2015)

His strategy for disclosure was to be open about his disability, because he felt that he needed reasonable adjustments for the interview in order to compete against other candidates. However, based on his personal experience with employers, some could be put off once they knew about the disability, because they potentially associated this with higher costs or expenditure. Vincent’s story expressively stated that declaring a disability for some jobseekers was not a choice, but rather a necessity to receive reasonable adjustments, because recruitment and selection practices can lead to disability inequality when designed on ableist norms.

Likewise, Quinn, who had a visual impairment and was in his 30s, explained that he would have to tell the employer that he had an impairment, because he needed reasonable adjustments in the interview. However, he also said that it does not automatically mean that employers provide the equipment.

‘I wouldn’t be able to do it unless I have my settings, so you got to tell them. Some people, some places sorted it out...but [others] you get there and they oh we couldn’t find it. I have even taken my keyboard to an interview before... And they were: Oh no we don’t have any black keyboard, they are all white. And I tell them: Oh, I can’t see a white keyboard. And they said: You can’t bring any external stuff here... It is just a USB keyboard, it is a normal keyboard, and they said: Oh no. And I brought it plugged it in and they said: Oh right, how does it work? There is no difference, it is just that the letters are bigger, and it is black’ (Quinn, Volunteer, 21.01.2015)

His experience showed that he did not feel that he had a choice of whether or not to disclose, but that it was for him a necessity in order to receive reasonable adjustments for the interview. He also pointed out that some employers make the process of receiving reasonable adjustments during the selection process difficult for him, because they lack the awareness of understanding their duty and in what way their practices might be disabling for individuals.

Thus, his strategy was to bring his own equipment to the interview in order to make sure that the process was accessible for him.

The story shared demonstrates that even though he had adopted a proactive job seeking approach, he was not offered a job in 4 years until recently, as an administrative supporter on a 12 months fixed-term contract, just before he took part in this study. This highlights that some disabled jobseekers might not only face discrimination because they are open about their impairment on the job application, but they might also face exclusion from the interview when employers fail to comply with their duty to provide reasonable adjustments in the selection stage.

While the majority of interviewees perceived that declaring their disability to the employer was an essential step during their job searches, the reason behind their disclosure differed. Some jobseekers said that they have to tell the employer about their impairment because it was visible, and the disclosure was important to build a respectable relationship with the employer. Others felt that concealing a disability was not in the employer or in their own interest, in particular if they required any reasonable adjustments during the interview. However, rather than being a personal choice, these strategies of disclosure highlighted that subconsciously individuals felt it was their obligation to tell employers.

Some jobseekers explained that they did not want to tell the employer on their application, because they felt it was vital to meet an employer in person first. They perceived that engaging in a face-to-face dialogue would help to challenge any prejudice or stigma that employers might have against disabled people and they were able to personally demonstrate that they had the right abilities to do the job. For example, Tessa was in her 50s, had a college degree in business administrative, a variety of work experiences, and had also spent some time being unemployed, explained that:

‘A lot of times, I would just put no... If someone sees you and sees how you are [it can change their perception]. Even if you admit it at some point, then at least they know what you are capable of, rather than just saying: Oh, it is impossible for that person to do it.’ (Tessa, Employee, 03.03.2015)

For Tessa the process of concealing her visual impairment was a way to challenge any stigma that an employer might have towards a disabled jobseeker. She felt that once the employer would meet her in person she would be able to demonstrate her abilities to do the job. While her strategy for concealing might be a way to challenge that direct discrimination can have an impact on whether someone gets selected for a job interview, it might not be able

challenge implicit disability inequality that is deeply embedded within the interview or assessment process.

As the interviews progressed, individuals also pointed out that some employers had used their disclosure on the job application as a direct way to select against them. These experiences of direct disability discrimination shifted individual strategies of disclosing and they tried to take control of the timing of their disclosure to employers. For instance, Quinn, who had a visual impairment, was in his 30s, and had just been offered a job as administrative support worker, revealed how he changed his strategy of disclosure.

‘It is usually a section at the end asking you, age, sexuality, gender, disability, religion and all that. Equal opportunities and all that...I always used to tick. But then, I got to the stage where I thought that isn’t right and I stopped ticking it...and then ‘Oh I’ve got an interview’, it starting to get weird... But it usually says, when you get an interview [that] there will be a short test... then I usually contact them and say what is involved and then I tell them. (Quinn, Volunteer, 21.01.2015)

It appears that Quinn had experienced instances of direct disability discrimination by employers during the recruitment stage. This was explained by the way he changed his approach of applying for jobs by removing any account of an impairment on the job application by engaging in ‘passing’, not as a way to reject his disabled identity, but rather to ease the experience of psycho-emotional disablism (Brune and Wilson, 2013). In response, he unexpectedly received invitations for job interviews. He therefore altered his job search strategy and tried to confront the stigma attached to his impairment and to further reduce his experience of psycho-emotional disablism. From thereon he only got in contact with the employer to request reasonable adjustments if he knew that there was a practical test involved once he had been selected for a job interview. Quinn’s experience suggests that equal opportunity monitoring forms, even though they should only be used for equality monitoring purposes of the organisation, can have a direct impact on recruitment decisions. While employers are not obliged to monitor how many job applications they receive from different groups, which could be a way to identify indirect discrimination, they should however comply with the Equality Act 2010 and not discriminate against a candidate based on their personal information (GOV, 2017a).

During the interviews, jobseekers also made reference to the Positive about Disabled People’s Two Tick scheme, as discussed in chapter 3, which is a positive action approach that employers can adopt to challenge inequality within their recruitment practices. In order

to be considered, jobseekers are required to disclose an impairment on the job application and will be invited for an interview if they match the essential criteria on the job description. In general, the experiences that jobseekers had with this scheme were contradictory. Some individuals felt that ticking the box would help them further with their job application, but they had never received any feedback from employers and thought they were unfairly treated. As it stands, the Two Tick scheme does not require that employers provide feedback to jobseekers, which in this case would have been important for the jobseeker in order to understand that the decision might have been genuine. The negative experiences encountered however, made jobseekers suspicious towards employers who promoted that they were positive about recruiting disabled people, and individuals said that they were less likely to declare an impairment on future job applications.

Some jobseekers also expressed their disapproval of this positive action initiative for the reason that it was patronising for disabled people. In fact, Morgan who had a visual impairment, was in his 20s, had a college degree in media studies and had been unemployed for 12 months, explained that he stopped declaring his disability, because he wanted to be invited to an interview on merit only.

‘Whenever there is a box that you can tick to wish to be considered for the two-tick policy, most of the time, I don't tick that, because I want to get it on merit. I don't just want to get an interview, because I have bad eyes.’ (Morgan, Volunteer, 28.10.2014)

In Morgan's opinion, this policy made him feel inferior to non-disabled people (Thomas, 1999), because he perceived that employers used his disability as selection criteria. His experience can be explained in that policies that are implemented to ‘level the playing field’ can be viewed as undermining principles of fairness (Åslund and Nordström Skans, 2012). Consequently, jobseekers assume that they will only be selected for an interview because of their group membership and not based on their merit. The personal experiences with this scheme had been conflicting and disabled jobseekers were less likely to tick the box, because they wanted to be selected based on merit and not because of their individual attributes.

Findings of this study highlight that disclosing an impairment to employers had been a very personal decision for individuals and it was not just as simple as ticking a box. The majority of jobseekers felt that it was not a choice, but it was their obligation to disclose. In fact, this process of declaring was directly influenced by the relationships that jobseekers had with past employers. Therefore, some individuals were open about their impairment on the job

application to gain the trust of employers, whereas others engaged in ‘passing’ by concealing their disability until they felt comfortable enough to disclose it. Both strategies were used by jobseekers as ways of demonstrating employers that they can do the job irrespective of impairment. In general, it can be said that even though individuals were able to put off their disclosure to employers and to take control over the timing, there was no optimal strategy that avoided the process of disclosing itself, because jobseekers were reliant on employers to make their recruitment practices inclusive.

### **The search for the inclusive employer**

From the point of view of employment advisors from both disabled people’s organisations that supported individuals during their job searches, the process of disclosing was seen in a more positive light. They actively encouraged jobseekers to disclose their disability to employers, because they thought it would help the jobseekers receive any reasonable adjustments during the interviews that they might require. Nonetheless, employment advisors acknowledged that there might be some employers that use it as a way to select out candidates. This was evident in Ethan’s account who was working for Company D. He described:

‘The reasons why they ask though is, well, I suppose you can’t talk for all the employers out there. But for some of them, they just want to find out if there is anything they can do to make sure whatever disability you put down that they make reasonable adjustments for you. That said, sometimes this can be used negatively. There has to be systems in place where that is not the reason for not progressing someone in the application process.’ (Ethan, Employment Advisor at Company D, interviewed with Ian, 06.08.2014)

After considerations, Ethan acknowledged that not every employer might use the personal information shared in a genuine way. He said that disability might be used as selection criteria and advised that employers should make arrangements to challenge disability inequality within the recruitment process.

While employment advisors recognized that jobseekers might be scared to inform an employer about their disability, because of past experiences, they considered that the process of declaring could be used by jobseekers to find an employer that would value their talent and support them during the recruitment process, as well as within the workplace. For instance, Annabeth, Employment Advisor, talked about why she felt it was important to declare a disability on application forms:



‘Well I personally don’t encourage people to lie on applications.... If you get a positive employer that is positive about employing disabled people, that’s fantastic. If they give you a hard time anyway, do you want to work for them? Because you might not get the support you need whilst at work? So, I [personally] walk away from an employer and would not encourage any of my clients to apply for that job. I would say, ‘be honest and let’s see what comes back. They don’t deserve you otherwise.’ (Annabeth, Employment Advisor at Company D, interviewed with Edward, 16.06.2014)

Here Annabeth explained how she encouraged her clients to declare their disability on job application forms. While her view is formed by the idea that this would help individuals to end up working for an ‘inclusive employer’ who does make adjustments to the workplace, it also is underpinned by a negative tone that not declaring would be equivalent to lying to the employer. This view however takes away a person’s choice of whether or not they would like to disclose their disability, and jobseekers working with employment advisors might feel obligated to tick the box rather than doing it on their own terms.

While findings demonstrate that employment advisors believe that there are inclusive employers out there that are genuine with their support for disabled workers, this approach however might be problematic. Instead of challenging disability inequality by employers more widely in the labour market, these views tolerate that only a minority of employers should implement inclusive recruitment and selection practices.

The perspectives shared by jobseekers and employment advisors within this thesis demonstrate that both groups have contrasting motives for declaring or concealing a disability. The process of declaring is a very personal decision for jobseekers in order show the employer that they are able to do the job and is shaped by past experiences of discrimination, consequently individuals engage in strategies for disclosure or concealment. On the other hand, employment advisors encourage jobseekers to disclose and not to conceal their disability, because it is not only a way to receive reasonable adjustments, but is also a way to find an inclusive employer who is positive about individuals’ skills and supports them within the workplace. This view however might conflict with the personal strategy that a jobseeker would like to adopt. While not a single strategy of disclosure presents a way around this dilemma of disclosing, this thesis argues that the control over this process should be given to disabled jobseekers. They should decide at what time and place they feel comfortable to tell a prospective employer.

One can argue that the dilemma that disabled jobseekers encountered during the recruitment process has been created by adopting psychometric approaches to recruitment based on equal treatment informed by equality law, as noted in chapter 3, to treat everyone the same (see, Windolf, 1986; Jenkins, 1982; 1986; Jewson and Mason, 1986; Cockburn, 1991). However, when organisations assume that by adopting these ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’ recruitment tools it can minimise the risk of inequality, they inevitably ignore that the ideal worker norm is deeply embedded within the design of these formal recruitment practices that aim to provide equal treatment to all applicants. Therefore, it ignores that some jobseekers might require reasonable adjustments to remove any barriers during the recruitment process and that employer should treat them differently. The dilemma that jobseekers face during the process of disclosure could be challenged when employers adopt more of a relational approach to recruitment. This would involve an open exchange between jobseekers and employers to remove disabling barriers in the recruitment process and to openly explain to jobseekers in what way the personal information shared is being used.

The next section investigates how employers feel about the process of disclosing a disability, which demonstrates the unequal power balance between jobseekers and employers in the process of recruitment.

### **Direct and indirect ways of asking for disclosure**

Employers taking part in this study shared their views on how they felt about asking jobseekers pre-employment health questions. They generally agreed that the main purpose of asking the question was to provide jobseekers with reasonable adjustments for the interview. Employers acknowledged that they would not directly ask about a person’s impairment, but had rather adopted the new wording of ‘reasonable adjustments’ that is one exemption under the Equality Act 2010 (see Chapter 3). It permits employers to ask about pre-employment health questions within the recruitment process. This was evident in a discussion between Fiona, and Elisabeth, working for Company C.

Fiona: ‘I think it should be changed too is there a reasonable requirement you need for the interview?’

Elisabeth: ‘Yeah, absolutely. And this is where we train our consultants to say, do you need a reasonable adjustment. It is actually the same question.’

Fiona: ‘Yeah, I guess it is more positive, sort of spin on. As opposed to you don't just quite know why somebody is asking you that.’

(Fiona, interviewed with Elisabeth, 05.12.2014)

Here both participants admitted that asking a person whether they needed reasonable adjustments is similar to asking about a person's impairment. The only difference is that it is less directed towards the person's impairment itself, but rather to find out what reasonable adjustment would support them during the interview or assessment process. Even though the 'softer' wording has modified the question to be less direct, the information shared could be indirectly used to identify whether a jobseeker has an impairment.

Findings highlight that this exemption of asking to declare any reasonable adjustments instead of asking about a person's health was not able to change the information that was conveyed to employers during the recruitment and selection process. While employers taking part in this study were genuine about the reason for asking this question, which was to make sure that the disability did not impact on an individual's ability to access the recruitment and selection process, they were aware that other employers might use the personal information to the disadvantage of jobseekers. This complicated the process of declaring, because discriminatory social relations that most jobseekers had with past employers made it harder to have an open dialogue with jobseekers about reasonable adjustments.

### **The duty to provide reasonable adjustments**

As the interviews progressed, employers also referred to the reactive duty to provide reasonable adjustments, as discussed in Chapter 3. The reactive nature of the duty means that a jobseeker has to identify as a disabled person and request an adjustment in relation to his or her needs from the employer first before the duty applies. Employers within this study felt that other employers lack an understanding of this duty to provide reasonable adjustments and are also unaware of governmental schemes, such as Access to Work, that provide financial support to organisations towards implementing any changes to organisational practices. The experiences of some jobseekers above demonstrated the lack of awareness or fear of employers around reasonable adjustments during recruitment and selection practices, which could lead to unfair decisions when declaring a disability, because jobseekers are inevitably denied changes that could make these practices more inclusive. Kevin, Company G, explained that the problem was indeed an employers' fear or ignorance around reasonable adjustments.

‘I think there is a lot of myth around the expense of recruiting and hiring people with disabilities. Organisation don't understand reasonable adjustments and what that

process means, and sometimes it can be as simple as moving furniture, to extremes [where] you are buying a lot of kits, but there are organisations that will help you fund it. So, for me, it is all about learning, the fear of asking the questions [do you need any reasonable adjustments] and the fear of how to respond to the answer.’ (Kevin, Company G, 02.02.2015)

His stance revealed that whilst an employer has the duty to make adjustments by law if reasonable, in theory they could mistake it as a huge expense, whereas in practice the cost could be reduced with help of external organisations, such as Access to Work. Kevin believed that the one of the biggest barriers to recruit disabled people was because of the fear of having an open discussion with disabled jobseekers about reasonable adjustments. In his eyes, this was a major barrier that made the process of recruiting disabled people more difficult, because employers seem to ignore the importance of this discussion.

Similarly, Hanna, Company E, a disabled people’s organisation, argued that employers still lack the awareness of the government scheme called ‘Access to Work’. She claimed that while it had been quoted the ‘best kept secret’, and was running for over 18 years, perceptions around it had not changed and most employers were not even aware that this funding existed. This highlights how the role of the state by promoting their support with reasonable adjustments and towards increasing the usage of their Access to Work scheme was lacking commitment. Besides, Hanna also mentioned that disabled people themselves might not be aware of government support available. Though, this fact was not indicative for the majority of disabled jobseekers taking part in this study who were told about Access to Work, by both disabled people’s organisations who had widely promoted this funding opportunity and had helped some jobseekers, who were successful in getting offered a job, to obtain it in the past. In line with that, Isabel, Company E mentioned that based on internal data gathered by Accessible, nine out of ten employers said that they would find it difficult to employ someone who experienced sight loss. She assumed that one reason for this number could be that employers were not aware of any support systems including Access to Work, but likewise if an employer had a negative experience with this scheme, they would be less likely to initiate it again.

‘So, if we just use this as a rough idea, only one employer possible has an awareness of Access to Work, and I guess the other thing, some employers had experiences of Access to Work, which hasn't necessarily been positive. This has nothing to do with the person who has the disability, it is the process that has not helped... it is more the case that if they are doing it, they need to do it properly, or else it is self-defeated, there is no point going to talk with employers saying there is this fantastic scheme

Access to Work and then. One bad experience shuts the door and it is very difficult to get that door open again.’ (Isabel, interviewed with Hanna, 15.01.2015)

In fact, Lara, working for Company H, was registered as partially sighted and had more recently been through the process of acquiring Access to Work, explained:

‘I tried to use the government recommended partners to find support workers and it has been dismal. Access to Work was an appalling experience, [I] would not wish it to my worst enemy. There is no follow up; there is no feedback it is totally approach assessed-based. I’ve got equipment that I don't need, I’ve been trained on systems that are not compatible with Mac and I use Apple software all the time... It is a great concept, I promote it widely, but has this worked for you or is there anything else we can do email away from being a lot better.’ (Lara, Company H, 09.03.2015)

While her experience had been very off-putting, she still felt that the idea behind it was noble, and it offered a great support for organisations that might not be able to afford expenditure on reasonable adjustments. However, she argued that it was in need of improvements in order to provide the best support possible for disabled employees as well as their employers.

These findings demonstrated that this governmental scheme to challenge discriminatory organisational practices has clearly failed to address underlying processes of inequality regimes that are based on dominant ableist organisational mind-sets and practices that take no or little account of individual differences (Acker, 1990). In fact, using Access to Work as financial incentive might demonstrate that it is the individual who needs the support and not that the working environment is inaccessible. It is underpinned by the medical model of disability that is not sufficient to address the needs that disabled people might have and as Williams-Whitt and Taras (2010) argue employers should not just fit a disabled person into a job that has been designed for someone who is not disabled but should engage in a genuine approach to fit the job to the individual and their requirements.

Moreover, findings question whether reasonable adjustments provided to disabled people by Access to Work are tailored to individual needs and requires further investigation. Any negative experiences and perceptions on using this scheme might therefore discourage employers to hire disabled people in the first instance. While it is important to acknowledge that this support has helped some disabled people, it is also relevant to point out that the process of acquiring Access to Work can be a barrier itself and the scheme does only support disabled people who have already secured employment. It can be argued that these measures may therefore reinforce, not undermine, disability inequality in organisations and individuals’

lack of ideal qualities and behaviour, rather than challenge the inaccessible job design and working environment. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that a similar financial scheme for disabled jobseekers, in that they would be able to request equipment to undertake job searches, in particular online, is non-existent.

### **Positive Action**

As the interviews progressed, employers also referred to the Positive About Disabled People Two-Tick symbol mentioned by jobseekers above. This scheme permitted that employers can ask a direct question to find out about a person's disability. One employer (Energy) revealed that they had already adopted this scheme and others explained that they were starting to implement it. In theory, this scheme was seen by employers as a way to challenge disability inequality in organisations and to remove the impact that implicit selection criteria, such as personal attributes, could have on a selection decision. In practice, however most employers taking part in this study pointed out that this scheme had its major flaws, because it was hard to commit to all its requirements in practice. In fact, Christian, who worked for Company A, explained.

‘It feels absolutely wrong to me, and the only issue I had escalating to me in my role about that was someone complaining it was patronising. A disabled colleague, we did in the end recruit, but who actually thought the reason why he was getting into the interviews was because of his disability and not because of his skills. And you can't separate those things out and you can't separate how that felt for the individual. ‘Is it motivated by the right things?’ Yes. ‘Does it lead to positive consequences?’ Yes. ‘Would it be better if we didn't have to do that?’ Of course it would, but that is part of the world we live.’ (Christian, Company A, 25.11. 2014)

The personal experience that Christian had with a disabled colleague was in agreement with disabled jobseekers experience shared above. Christian made a clear point that the policy was motivated by the right thing to increase the chances of disabled people getting through to the recruitment process and to challenge social barriers to employment, but at the same time it could also be seen as patronising for some individuals and would not lead to the desired outcome.

Other employers explained that it was difficult to keep up with all the Two Tick requirements and there is danger that job applicants might assume that something had gone wrong, even though the decision of not being invited to an interview was genuine, because the candidate does not meet the minimum criteria for the job position. Adopting this view legitimises any

inequality that disabled jobseekers might experience and shifts the responsibility onto the jobseekers in that they expect to be moved onto the next stage, because they declare their disability. Thus, when employers that implement the Two Tick scheme adopt these viewpoints they might inevitably create disability inequality in their recruitment practices, rather than to remove it, because they might be selective in fulfilling the requirements. This account does raise concern about 'empty shells', whereas practices associated with the Two Tick symbol might only be used for marketing purposes, but might lack genuine substance (Hoque et al. 2004; Hoque, 2014).

From the above it can be said that the visibility of a power imbalance between jobseekers and employers within the process of declaring is evident. Although the Equality Act 2010 permits a direct question about a jobseekers' health, other than exemptions mentioned, asking whether someone needed reasonable adjustments for the interview can be used as an indirect way of obligating a disclosure. While employers taking part in this study were genuine about the reason for asking this question, they felt that other employers, who might not be as open to disabled people, might use the personal information shared in as implicit selection criteria during their recruitment and selection practices. This misuse of personal data experienced by jobseekers and negative encounters with past employers makes the process of declaring problematic. Whereas a way of challenging disability inequality and to build trusting relationships with jobseekers through the Two Tick scheme, employers in this study questioned the motive behind these interventions. Rather than challenging the transparency of these policies, employers embrace opposing opinions on the effectiveness or compliance to these policies and therefore reinforce rather than undermine underlying processes of inequalities within the labour market. Evidently, the process of disclosing is flawed. While jobseekers might be able to choose at what time they declare their disability to employers, they are unable to challenge the control that employers have over their personal information during the recruitment and selection process.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, disabled people shared their personal experiences of disability, which were unique in relation to their own particular context and form of impairment. The narratives revealed that relationships that jobseekers had with past employers, but also with themselves, lead to experiences of direct psycho-emotional disablism, and had impacted on their views of self as a worker and their job search strategies.

The majority of disabled people that took part in this study referred to their impairments as their individual barriers to work and had adopted ableist norms and experiences of internalised ableism, in an effort or desire to be accepted as equal and ideal workers. Some jobseekers born with their impairments engaged in personal strategies of overcoming their individual barriers by way of improving their impairments or engaged in ‘passing’ to ease experiences of psycho-emotional disablism, and to be viewed as closer to the socially accepted ableist norm. On the other hand, individuals that acquired their impairments later in life reinstated the ableist perspective that disabled people are less able and less productive compared to non-disabled people.

The findings of interviews with employers show that while they have explicit equalitarian goals, the majority relies predominately on the legal definition of disability, which legalises society’s subordinate view of disability. Consequently, employers believe that disability is something that impacts on the individuals’ ability to do the job and he or she requires reasonable adjustments, rather than challenging the real barriers to equality, which are embedded within organisational practices. This medicalised view adopted by disabled jobseekers and employers was opposed by disabled people’s organisations within this study that highlighted that the ‘real’ social barriers to employment have nothing to do with a person’s impairment but are created by an ableist society.

Undeniably, disabled jobseekers highlighted that social relationships with past employers had also contributed to instances of disability inequality and direct psycho-emotional disablism. These personal experiences of disability had impacted on their views of self and employers, which had changed their personal strategies of searching for a job over the years and their decision to declare a disability on the job application. Evidently, these insights show the power imbalance between employers and disabled jobseekers and ableist norms that exist within the process of recruitment. For most jobseekers within this study the process of declaring did not feel like a personal choice but rather an obligation to receive reasonable adjustments or to gain the employer’s trust, which led to experiences of exclusion or increased the fear of facing discrimination and they perceived that it had a direct influence on whether or not they were invited to an interview. Thus, individuals engaged in personal strategies of disclosure and, in some cases, concealment. Besides, employment advisors encouraged jobseekers to disclose that they are disabled, not only to receive reasonable adjustments, but more predominately to find an inclusive employer that was positive about employing disabled people. Although this encouragement is formed by the right intentions, to get individuals back into employment, it might take away a person’s choice of whether or



not they would like to disclosure, and jobseekers working with employment advisors might feel obligated to tick the box rather than doing it on their own terms.

While employers are no longer permitted under the Equality Act 2010 to ask a direct question about a jobseeker's health, apart from the exemptions named, employers admitted that using the wording of reasonable adjustment was an indirect way of obligating a person to disclose their disability. Even though the employers that took part in this study were genuine about the reason for asking this question, they noticed that other employers, who might not be as open to disabled people, might use the personal information shared as implicit selection criteria during their recruitment and selection practices. In fact, employers mentioned that the duty to provide reasonable adjustments was in practice not widely understood by most employers because it was seen as a reminder that disabled employees would be costly, despite the availability of Access to Work. This financial scheme offered by the government, was questioned by employers taking part in this study, of whether or not it has helped employers with the process of providing reasonable adjustments, whether it could make the working environment more inclusive or challenge the myth around the costs of recruiting disabled people.

In order to encourage the applications of disabled people, employers in this study had adopted or are in the process of adopting, a positive action approach to recruitment, as discussed in Chapter 3. Employers viewed this Two Tick scheme with scepticism, but rather than challenging the transparency of these policies, they embraced opposing opinions on the effectiveness of these policies. Evidently, the process of disclosing is flawed. The misuse of personal data shared by jobseekers and negative encounters with past employers made the process of declaring problematic. While jobseekers might be able to choose at what time they declare their disability to employers, they are unable to challenge the power imbalances that employers have over their personal information during the recruitment and selection process.

Summarising, findings of this chapter demonstrate that personal experiences of disability had impacted on a jobseeker's view of self and their personal strategies of job searching. Thus, even before jobseekers apply for a job, their past experiences place them in a different group to that of the prospective employer or potential co-worker. These experiences need to be considered when analysing the recruitment process because they have an impact on whether or not jobseekers are open to disclosure their disability on the job application. It can be argued that section 60 of the Equality Act 2010, based on an equal treatment approach to recruitment, was not able to challenge that unconscious bias or discrimination by employers

was reduced during job searches. In fact, this section ignores that most disabled jobseekers have to ask for reasonable adjustments during the recruitment process, because based on past experiences shared, most recruitment practices are not accessible to individuals. Hence, they have to disclose their disability on the job application in order to receive the support they need, which in some cases was not even provided. Thus, this section misses the point. It tries to treat jobseekers differently that they can request reasonable adjustments, but at the same time approaches it from the equal treatment approach to recruitment, therefore asking for disclosure of their health or disability is permitted. The process of disclosure then leads to a dilemma for jobseekers when they have to request reasonable adjustments in the recruitment process. This requires from them to declare their disability to the employer, which brings up the fear that this personal data might be used against them. The only way to understand these experiences has been through a social relational approach of disability, because it is not just the processes itself that discriminate against disabled people, but it is also past experiences that individuals bring with themselves to the recruitment process that can impact on their self-confidence of disclosing their disability to employers.

This chapter suggests that 'objective' and 'neutral' recruitment practices adopted by employers to treat everyone the same, might have led to these experiences of disability inequality. Thus, more proactive and relational approaches to recruitment that acknowledge individual differences might be required that involve an open exchange between jobseeker and employer to challenge disability inequality. This would however require from employers that they view disability as socially constructed and the duty to provide reasonable adjustments as a way to make the working environment more accessible for disabled people. The next chapter investigates online recruitment practices adopted by employers, and whether the Internet as a medium to recruit and select potential employees, can enforce the already existing social barriers for disabled people and ableist mind-sets within organisations.

## **Chapter 6: Online recruitment as an organising process producing disability inequality**

This chapter aims to explore how disabled people engage with online recruitment and processes during their job searches and applications. Further, it examines to what extent employers consider the impact of social barriers to the recruitment of disabled people via the Internet. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that in the same way that disabled jobseekers experience direct psycho-emotional disablism through social relations with employers (in form of disability discrimination in the labour market) as explored in Chapter 5. They may also experience indirect psycho-emotional disablism during their job searches and applications, which is associated with the experience of structural disablism (Reeve, 2014). These experiences recognise the psycho-emotional consequences of exclusion and discrimination, which serves to remind individuals that they are different, in addition to emotional reactions such as feeling hurt or anger of being excluded. While the experiences of disabled people shared in this research were unique, some common themes emerged.

This chapter demonstrates that online recruitment as an organising process can produce inequality, because practices are designed around taken for granted ableist norms that assume jobseekers can engage in online job seeking behaviours. These ideas can have a considerable, albeit often unintentional, impact on the design of recruitment practices and produce disability inequality not only in organisations, but also in the labour market more widely. The stories shared in the process of the research include primarily the perspectives of disabled jobseekers, but also of employment advisors from two disabled people's organisations, who have worked closely with disabled jobseekers, as well as perceptions of employers, who have tried to implement recruitment practices that are more inclusive but to various degrees of depth.

This chapter begins by showing how jobseekers have faced real barriers when they engage in on-line job searches and applications. These experiences led to experiences of indirect psycho-emotional disablism. Jobseekers encountered barriers in the form of unequal access to the Internet, the lack of accessibility of online application processes, and also the inaccessibility of services provided by the public library or Jobcentre Plus. Consequently, some jobseekers did not engage in online job seeking behaviour or they stopped using public support services.

The findings of interviews with employers are used in the last part of this chapter to show that even within organisations that have explicit egalitarian goals, existing inequality regimes are hard to shift. Thus, the analysis of the findings is informed by Acker's (2006) inequality regimes, which as explained in chapter 3, consists of six components. This chapter tries to uncover the following four components that jointly form the bases of disability inequality and the shape and scale of disability inequality in organisations. These four components are: a) recruitment as an organising process producing disability inequality, b) the visibility of disability inequality, in particular the awareness of employers of unequal access to the Internet and the inaccessibility of services provided by Jobcentre Plus, c) the legitimacy of disability inequality when adopting online recruitment processes, and d) control and compliance, which is manifested in power derived from hierarchical social relations and which impedes changes in inequality regimes.

### **Engagement with online recruitment processes**

This section demonstrates that engagement with online recruitment processes can lead to indirect psycho-emotional disablism, which can arise when disabled people are required to undertake recruitment processes on the Internet during their job searches and applications. It highlights that disabled jobseekers face real barriers to engage in online job seeking behaviour, because of the lack of accessibility of online recruitment practices. Acts of exclusion can operate at both material and psycho-emotional level. As such, it serves to remind individuals that they are different, in addition to emotional reactions such as feeling hurt or anger of being excluded (Reeve, 2014). The chapter acknowledges that not every disabled person might experience this form of disablism, and it can change with time and place.

When asked about the experience that interviewees had with online recruitment and selection practices, the majority of disabled people explained that they had faced barriers. Personal stories revealed that some individuals had experienced what is termed here as indirect psycho-emotional disablism, and felt excluded or discriminated against, because they believed that barriers to access the Internet for job searches were related to having an impairment. It is important to reflect on these engagements with online recruitment processes and to explore how the Internet, which is considered by interviewees as a 'disabling environment', and used as a medium for recruitment, has widened the opportunities gap between individuals who are able to engage in job searches and those who are not able to access employment opportunities (Easton, 2013). The narratives shared in this section

describe that the engagements with online recruitment processes were unique in relation to an individual's own context and form of impairment.

### **Unequal access to the Internet**

Within this study one third of jobseekers mentioned that they did not have access to the Internet or assistive technology at home due to financial constraints. A small number of these jobseekers were not actively engaging in job searches at the time, because they perceived that their low level of IT skills hindered them in their access to employment opportunities online. From this viewpoint, jobseekers opened up about their personal experiences of exclusion in this digital age and explained that the changes in the attraction stage that has shifted its location from traditional media (such as, newspapers) to the Internet and had prevented them from participating in job seeking activities. This was manifested in Edwards's view, who was in his late 40s and has a learning difficulty and hearing impairment. He explained that he wanted to leave his current part-time job as a cleaner for one of the big supermarkets in the UK, but he felt restricted in his ability to apply for jobs on the Internet.

‘I can't get on the computer that is my weakness. My weakness is my disability. I lost so much education when I was young... [I am] not [searching for jobs] at the moment, because for most of the jobs you have to look on the websites anyway. It is not what it used to be. You could walk into an employer and hand your CV over. It has all changed now over the years. It is now all on the computer... I can't get on the Internet... When I started school, we did not have any computer then. The new generation learned it. (Edward, Employee, interviewed with Annabeth, 16.06.2014)

Referring back to past experiences with job searching, Edward recounted that computers did not play a big part in the past, implying that there might be a link between individuals' age group and their knowledge of IT skills. As a consequence, he felt that technology had an impact on the way that employers advertise their job opportunities, and this had a negative consequence on his ability to find a different job. Edward felt excluded from the labour market and frustrated because he was not able leave his current job to develop a career. His experiences showed that he did not have the choice to search and work for another employer. Likewise, he accepted that his lack of IT skills was interlinked with his experience of growing up with an impairment that restrained him personally when searching for work in today's labour market. His experience shows that information and communication technology (ICT) can impose structural barriers on people who are not trained to use it.

This experience was also similar for Bethany, who was in her 20s, was living in supported housing and had a visual impairment and learning difficulty. She was currently studying at the University and undertaking voluntary work.

‘Well, we do not have computers here [at the supported housing]...[Using a computer] is really difficult for me. Staff [at the community support service] had to do it. They did it with me, but that was like looking for a house and applications, it was difficult. The government is making it awkward, they don’t make it easy for disabled people to move on in life...I always need support, because I am not familiar [with it] well I [only] learned the basics when I was at school.’ ((Bethany, Volunteer, interviewed with Annabeth, 02.06.2016)

She explained that at the moment she only had access to a computer when using the community support service or the library. However, she felt let down by the government in making access to computers and the Internet easier for disabled people. While she had learned some basic skills at school, she said that she was dependent on a support worker to help her with tasks online, which was down to her disability as she phrased it. This experience demonstrates that access to the Internet for individuals who rely on supported housing is difficult to obtain, which can hinder them not only in accessing jobs online, but also from participating in everyday life.

These barriers experienced by both Edward and Bethany can not only hinder jobseekers from accessing the technologies, but it is a reminder of exclusion. This can lead to experiences of indirect psycho-emotional disablism, because some individuals might feel frustrated or hurt and they might stop engaging in job searches to ease these experiences. This finding suggests that experiences of exclusion from accessing employment opportunities are directly linked to technological developments within the employment context, which might not only impose a barrier for disabled people, but also for other groups of jobseekers, such as older jobseekers that did not get the opportunity to learn these IT skills needed to engage in online job seeking behaviours (Hogler et al., 1998; Scholz et al. 2017).

For some jobseekers that had access to the Internet at home, a barrier that hindered them seeking and applying for jobs was related to the inaccessibility of the computers that they owned prior to acquiring an impairment. From this perspective, individuals explained that they were not able to afford assistive technology, due to their unemployment, and felt constrained from engaging in online job seeking activities. This can be seen in the case of Nigel, who was in his mid-20s and had been self-employed prior to acquiring his visual

impairment. He had been working for an auctioneer doing house clearances and deliveries for his family business and had now been unemployed for one and a half years.

‘Yeah, I was not at all good at the computer, but I got by. So, I had the basics, but I don’t use it at all now. There is no point. At home there is no point in me going on it. I can’t read it. I can’t type properly. I avoid it, if I am honest with you... I am not the most academic but if I can see what I am doing, I can do it yeah. It is just the barrier of the sight problem.’ (Nigel, Jobseeker, interviewed with Gabriel, 28.10.2014)

Nigel explained that his past experience of the Internet compared with his current experience made him feel that there was ‘no point’ in engaging with the Internet for his job searches. His story shows that for some individuals, who are not able to access or use a computer for their job searches, facing this structural barrier of exclusion can lead to direct psycho-emotional disablism because they might feel frustrated and therefore they stop engaging in job seeking behaviour to ease this experience.

Taking these experiences into consideration a number of interviewees felt that that employers had adopted a one-size-fits-all application process, which ignored the underlying processes of exclusion within society that might hinder them from actively engaging in job searches and applications on the Internet. For instance, Kay, who has learning difficulties, was 46 and had been unemployed for over 20 years pointed out that:

‘There is another problem...it is the way that employers think it is another panacea of getting the workforce, ‘oh well apply online and the Internet is awesome’. Unless you know where to look in the first place, which is a minefield, there are many jobs that go unheeded because they are only advertising online.’ (Kay, Volunteer, interviewed with Florence, 01.09.2014)

This use of the Internet to advertise therefore begs the question whether jobs are found or whether or not employers miss out on reaching particular groups of individuals. Kay explained that he was angry with employers because they assume the Internet was opening a new ideal way of recruiting the workforce and can remove barriers to reach potential applicants. However, he said what employers tend not to recognise is that it can impose social barriers for individuals who are not as IT literate as others, who have no Internet access at home, or who face difficulties engaging with ICTs with or without assistive technologies.

These narratives of jobseekers highlight an important aspect of the growing importance of the Internet for recruitment processes and that using this medium can impose a real barrier for disabled people who are not able to access a computer and the Internet, because of

financial constraints or lack of IT skills (Scholz et al. 2017), but also for older jobseekers who might not be as IT literate. Disabled jobseekers can experience indirect psycho-emotional disablism, because this exclusion from applying for employment opportunities is not only imposed at the structural level, but also at the psycho-emotional level, because they feel hurt or anger of being excluded from the labour market and stop engaging in job seeking behaviour. These personal experiences reflect how most employers have a tendency to assume that the Internet is easy to access for everyone, the same way as they act in regard to the accessibility of R&S practices. This ableist view ignores the perspectives shared by interviewees that the Internet is often not accessible for disabled people, which may restrain them from engaging in online job searches.

### **The lack of accessibility of online application processes**

For the majority of individuals who had actively engaged in online application processes, the bigger issues that arose were related to the inaccessibility of recruitment websites and the online application itself. More than half of individuals with learning difficulties, but only a minority of individuals with a visual impairment, taking part in this study agreed that it was difficult for them to successfully fill in job applications without help from employment advisors or family and friends. However, a small number of interviewees said that an online application was easier to complete compared to a paper-based application, which shows that once individuals have access to ICT it can be an asset. Yet, most respondents recounted how they had encountered difficulties because of the lack of accessibility of online application processes, which reminded them that they are different, and some individuals felt frustrated or upset during their job searches online. Experiences of exclusion and discrimination were evident when individuals reflected on attempts to engage with online recruitment and selection practices, either by themselves or with help of their employment advisors.

Many individuals with visual impairments who took part in this study mentioned that they were confronted with employer websites, which were inaccessible in its design and therefore not compatible with assistive technology at hand. For instance, Diana, who had a visual impairment, was in her 30s, had a bachelor's degree in family law and had a part-time job as employment advisor since over a year, explained:

‘Online applications sometimes were difficult. With zoom, sometimes you miss out on some bits, when you look at one part of the screen. If you have a webpage that has questions on either side you miss them, so you go through the application form



and then realise there were questions on the other side. That can take quite a lot of your process.’ (Diana, Employee, 03.06.2014)

Her story shows that jobseekers can experience structural barriers, in form of online applications that are not compatible with zoom technology when engaging with recruitment processes. This illustrates that even though individuals might be able to access the job application on the Internet, if these online application processes are not designed with assistive standards in mind they can negatively affect online job search activities of disabled people. The inaccessibility of the application process can remind individuals that there are different to the ableist norm and thus have an effect on their psycho-emotional wellbeing.

Likewise, jobseekers were concerned with job specifications and application forms used by employer. These were only available in PDF formats and individuals found it problematic to change the colour contrast on them to make them easier to read. Despite the fact that jobseekers directly informed employers that they found it difficult to read these documents and asked for alternative formats, their requests were often ignored. This is evident in the experience shared by Quinn, who had a visual impairment, was in his 30s, and had just been offered a job.

‘On some application forms, even in Word, they have formatting where the boxes are white even when you change it. Online application forms have never been a problem, unless it is a PDF, but then I print it off and do it... The problem [for me] is job specs and PDFs. I rang people [employers] up to ask for an alternative form, [but] never got one...’ (Quinn, Volunteer, 21. January 2015)

While the problem has clearly been the wrong formatting of job application documents, he also referred to instances where he had asked employers for alternative formats, but he had never received them. His case demonstrates that employers had not fulfilled their reactive duty under section 20 of the Equality Act, even though they were made aware that the online application process has put him at a substantial disadvantage because of disability. This story shows that not only can jobseekers experience structural barriers in the form of inaccessible information during job searches online that can evoke emotional response such as feeling angry or hurt, but individuals can also experience discrimination by employers who ignore requests from jobseekers for alternative job applications. These experiences of indirect psycho-emotional disablism, arising from structural barriers, and direct psycho-emotional disablism, arising from a relationship that a disabled person has with others, can jointly impact on the psycho-emotional wellbeing of disabled people.

For individuals with learning difficulties, the problems that confronted them was related to the amount of written information that they had to go through when completing an online application form. While some respondents struggled to use their email address and to upload documents or CVs on an online system, the majority explained that they found it difficult to apply for jobs because of language and specific terms used by employers on application forms. For instance, Georgia who had a learning difficulty, was in her 20s, and had studied catering and hospitality at a collage, and was now looking for hospitality work, described how the online application process was a barrier, as was the terminology commonly used on job applications. She felt restricted by job searches and applications online without support of Dan, her Employment Advisor, working for Company D. During this interview, Dan, made further comments on their shared experiences and said that:

‘It is how questions are worded sometimes. One of the biggest issues, some of the applications forms takes an hour and a half to fill in. A lot of them [online application systems] time [you] out and if you don’t fill them in on time you have to start all over again. It is crazy. (Dan, Employment Advisor at Company D, interviewed with Georgia, 10.07.2014)

Here Dan pointed out multiple barriers that they had encountered during their job searches on the Internet. These were in relation to the inaccessible language and the lengths of the online job application, but also, and more predominately, the time restrictions of the online application process, which can put disabled jobseekers at a substantial disadvantage. His account suggests that when employers use built-in access restrictions as part of their online application processes it can have a considerable impact because it inevitably restrains some individuals who might need more time to apply for jobs online than is anticipated by employers.

In a similar vein, one jobseeker hinted that automatic recruitment systems could have a serious impact on an individual’s success of their job application. In this context, Kay, who had a learning difficulty, was 46 and has been unemployed for over 20 years, explained that:

‘Employers want this buzzword and then two months later they want another buzzword and that one is old. That is the killer on the CV. Usually, when I applied for jobs; they kick you out if you don’t mention the buzzword. There are automatic systems that decide. What is the point of a CV nowadays, if it won’t pass any tests? So the CV is a barrier in itself, for everybody.’ (Kay, Volunteer, interviewed with Florence, 01.09.2014)

Kay felt it was difficult for him to predict these buzzwords, which were used as selection criteria by employers and questioned ‘what is the point’ of CVs if they do not help someone to get a job. This finding illustrates that jobseekers have to be able to foresee keywords (buzzwords or jargon) that the scanning software implemented by employers might use to match prospective workers with the programmed set of words for the job position (Schullery et al. 2009). Thus, when employers adopt these automatic-scanning systems, they implicitly select out applications from disabled people or others who are not as literate or familiar with these keywords, from getting further in the recruitment process.

These examples from interviewees show that once jobseekers were able to get access to the Internet, they faced online application processes that were inaccessible to them, and easy read formats or alternative documentations were limited, even sometimes unavailable. The data suggests that these online application processes are used as a form of pre-selection, because employers apply implicit criteria around socially accepted ideas of the ideal worker to filter out candidates. The personal experiences of exclusion from the online recruitment process that jobseekers shared in this study show the impact of indirect psycho-emotional disablism for disabled people. Individuals found it difficult to apply for jobs online, because employers had adopted a one-size-fits-all application process, which was designed around taken for granted ableist assumptions of the ideal worker and ignored individual differences (Acker, 2006). The next section reflects on public service providers, such as the library or Jobcentre that offer Internet access or employment support to the general public. It highlights personal experiences of encountered by disabled jobseekers when using these public services.

### **Interactions with public service providers**

Jobseekers who did not have computers at home (or no internet access) were forced to use the public library or Jobcentre Plus to apply for jobs. As discussed in Chapter 3, unlike the reactive duty of employers, public service providers have the anticipatory duty to disabled people to make reasonable adjustments under section 20 of the Equality Act 2010 (Lawson, 2011; EHRC, 2014). This means that the public library or Jobcentre Plus is required to monitor their services and functions and to anticipate any substantial disadvantage that disabled people are exposed to by their provisions, criteria or practices, by their physical features, or by their auxiliary aid or services (Lawson, 2011). The stories shared by interviewees however, indicate that these public service providers have not considered their

anticipatory duty under the Equality Act 2010 and some of their services and information were not accessible to disabled users.

### **Restricted access to the Internet in public libraries**

For jobseekers unable to afford Internet access at home, the library was an option, however it became apparent during the interviews that only a few interviewees had been to the library in recent months. The reason for this was that jobseekers felt the services provided were not accessible. Experiences shared in this study suggest that individuals only received one hour of 'free' Internet at the library and respondents explained that this was not enough time for them to search or to apply for jobs online. For example, this was evident in Edward's account. He was in his late 40s, had learning difficulties and was keen to find new employment.

'I try to go to the library if I can. The problem is to get on the computer and to look for jobs [and] to put in your email. You can only use it for an hour and then you have to pay for it. I haven't been to the library for a while.' (Edward, Employee, interviewed with Annabeth, 16.06.2014)

He explained that he had faced restrictions on several occasions in accessing the computer facilities in the library. This had a direct impact on his job search activities. This personal experience demonstrates that Edward felt excluded because of access restrictions and he avoided going to the library and eventually stopped applying for jobs. This indicates that some jobseekers who might not have Internet access at home and who would benefit from this public access to the Internet might feel reluctant to return to these venues in the future because of their experiences of exclusion, which then inevitably impacts on their job search activities.

The inaccessibility of library services was also evident when employment advisors at Inclusive made use of these public facilities to support their clients with their job searches and applications. Florence, employment advisor at Company D reflected on a shared experience with Liam, one of her clients and participant in this study.

'The hardest thing is to log on. And you have to put in the library card number, and your pin and what if you do it wrong and then you don't have [much] time [left]. We used your [Liam] library card and then we used mine, so that we had extra time. It is not great.' (Florence, Employment Advisor at Company D, interviewed with Liam, 01.09.2014)

Her story demonstrates that some disabled people's organisations, such as company D, who focus on supporting disabled people during their job searches, are also reliant on these public services to provide employment support. Florence tried to challenge the limited time restriction available by using her personal library card to receive another hour of 'free' Internet. However, she said that even two hours were not enough time to submit a job application. These stories indicate that the activities that are involved when filling in an online job application are very time consuming not just for disabled people personally, but also when jobseekers receive employment support from their employment advisors. This indicates that libraries have not offered tailored Internet access facilities for disabled jobseekers or others that that rely on using these public services.

Furthermore, some jobseekers explained how they were constrained from using these services to search for jobs, because of the lack of assistive technologies. For example, Ulrich said that he did not go to the public library, because the facilities were not accessible to him.

'No. What is the point? To be fair, I don't think they have speech on the library computers anyways, which again that is actually annoying me. I don't know if the library here does, but I think they once had a computer with an old version of Jaws. I personally think that every library should have a computer with speech on it, because at the end of the day, it is all about accessibility.' (Ulrich, Volunteer, interviewed with Gabriel, 31.03. 2015)

Even though Ulrich had access to the Internet at home, he argued that the library should be obligated to be accessible for everyone in society, including disabled people.

These findings highlight that most public services offered by the library that jobseekers used were inaccessible for most people within this study irrespective of impairment, but also seem to be insufficiently under resourced. The stories shared by respondents of highlight that issues of access were not just related to the design of the Internet as a 'disabling environment', but the way that library rules around Internet access, and physical access to hardware, such as computers, discriminated against people with impairments (Easton, 2011).

### **Disabling environments created by Jobcentre Plus**

As the interviews progressed, interviewees also opened up about similar experiences with Jobcentre Plus, and jobseekers revealed that they either stopped or were prevented from using these services, because they were not accessible to them. Several jobseekers mentioned that Jobcentre Plus did not provide support for them nor they did not have accessible

technology on their computers. For example, Nigel explained only way to apply for jobs was to go to his Work Choice (voluntary employment programme) provider.

‘The only place, I can apply for a job is here [at my Work Choice Provider]. I come here twice a week, because they’ve got a computer that is massive. It is like a cinema screen, so I can use that just about. I got a special thing [magnifier] where I can put paper underneath and it blows it up... because the jobcentre, they don't seem to understand. They ask: ‘Why am I not searching on other days?’ And I say, I can’t. Why can’t you come here [to the Jobcentre]? Do you have a big computer? No, we haven’t. It is annoying really.’ (Nigel, Jobseeker, interviewed with Gabriel, 28.10.2014)

Nigel’s experience of discrimination demonstrated that the Jobcentre was incapable of recognising his individual needs and that he was unable to look for more jobs without the right adjustment to their facilities. Thus, it seems that once a disabled jobseeker had a negative encounter at the Jobcentre, he or she was less likely to use these employment services in the future. The finding shows that jobseekers might not only experience indirect psycho-emotional disablism, due to the inaccessible of the structural environment, but they might also face direct psycho-emotional disablism because of social relations with their Disability Employment Advisors at the Jobcentre. This puts disabled people at a substantial disadvantage in the labour market, because not only does this experience show that the Jobcentre has failed to fulfil their anticipatory duty to provide reasonable adjustments to disabled jobseekers, such as auxiliary aids or services (such as assistive technology or software), but it also demonstrates the inadequacy of employment services delivered by this public service provider.

It also became apparent that it was not only the physical environment of Jobcentre Plus that was inaccessible to disabled jobseekers, but respondents also mentioned that the virtual environment, the Jobcentre Plus (Universal Jobmatch) website now taken over by Monster (a private job board) was an additional barrier. Jobseekers mentioned that job applications forms provided on this platform were not accessible and also questioned the general quality and effectiveness of this public site. For instance, Quinn who had a visual impairment, was in his 30s, and had just been offered a job, criticised the general quality and effectiveness of the site. Quinn explained that since Jobcentre Plus had given over their site to Monster, the jobs advertised were only agency jobs and most of them were fraudulent.

‘The jobcentre website used to be quite good, but since they have given it to an agency, Monster runs it now [under Universal Jobmatch]...All jobs on there are

agency jobs, and I started applying for them and 99 per cent of them don't exist. They are there to get you to signed up, a job will come on, you ring up and they say no sorry that job is gone, but we've got this one...I sent my CV and I've got jobs for welders, because that is what I used to do. And I said I couldn't do that anymore, that took the agency to sort out and then I just gave up on them. None of the jobs existed it was all agencies... So, I gave up on that.' (Quinn, Volunteer, 21.01.2015)

His story shows that the digitalisation of job search processes combined with a government policy of privatisation has created further disabling experiences for disabled jobseekers. Quinn explained when using this job board during his job searches, he was offered jobs that he had done prior to acquiring an impairment, which reminded him that he was different, and this had an impact on his psycho-emotional wellbeing. Moreover, he was also made aware that most of these jobs advertised were 'fake' and only advertised to get him signed up to recruitment agencies. Consequently, the direct and indirect barriers experienced provoked him to 'give up' and he stopped using this public job board. This finding suggests an intersecting problem of the privatisation of this public platform, which has been designed and run by Monster, which requires further research. It seems that there has been a lack of security on the site because 'rogue' employers have been able to post 'fake' vacancies on this job board and might have used it as a way to get unauthorised access to the personal information uploaded by jobseekers (Monster 2015).

These stories shared by jobseekers with Jobcentre Plus convey highly problematic encounters and provide evidence that these employment services lead to personal experiences of disability for disabled jobseekers. Findings demonstrate that the physical and virtual environment designed by the Jobcentre was designed around taken for granted ableist norms that everyone is able to access the Internet and has the IT skills to do so, which ignores the individual needs of people who do not fit this category. This indicates major obstacles for disabled people (and others) who would benefit from more personalised support and shows that organising processes of services provided by Jobcentre maintain rather than challenge disability inequality in the labour market more widely.

The experiences of jobseekers shared in this study regarding these public service providers suggest that facilities had not offered auxiliary aids or services (such as assistive technology or software), and therefore not complied with their duty to remove any 'substantial disadvantage' to services offered for disabled users (see EA, s.212) (Easton, 2011a). As such, the data shows that when organising processes of the library and Jobcentre Plus are designed around taken for granted ableist norms, services lead to unfair user experiences and produce

disability inequality. The narratives shared by disabled jobseekers suggest that they had experienced indirect psycho-emotional disablism because of the inaccessibility of these services and individuals felt rejected and hesitant to use these public services in the future. The next section tries to demonstrate that even though employers taking part in this study had explicit egalitarian goals to remove disability inequality within their recruitment processes, these social barriers evidenced by disabled jobseekers when engaging with online recruitment processes were not entirely anticipated by organisations. Thus, employers had inevitably maintained their inequality regimes rather than challenged disability inequality within their recruitment processes.

### **The one-size-fits-all application process**

This section takes a closer look at the practical experience of employers with online recruitment practices and whether or not organisations were aware that recruitment processes produce inequalities. The majority of employers taking part in this study were conscious of the more visible barriers that disabled jobseekers could face when undertaking job searches and applications on the Internet. Some organisations that worked with or for disabled people as their core business had already designed accessible hiring practices, while other organisations were at the beginning of this process. The findings demonstrate that socially accepted ideas about the ideal worker, are deeply embedded in the design of the online recruitment processes. This section tries to uncover the following four components of Acker's inequality regimes (2006) that jointly form the bases of disability inequality and the shape and scale of disability inequality in organisations.

### **Visibility of disability inequality**

Acker (2006) defines the first component, the visibility of inequality, as the 'degree of awareness of inequalities' that exists in organisations. This lack of awareness can differ in organisations and it might be intentional or unintentional. Within this study, the visibility of disability inequality was evident in the lack of awareness shared by two employer respondents in this study (Company A and Company B). They admitted that they had not thought that unequal access to the Internet could be an issue for disabled jobseekers. For example, Brigitte said:

'Just because somebody is disabled doesn't mean they don't have the Internet or access to the Internet. If they haven't got access to the Internet, they are other ways [which] we can do it. But we have not come across this situation just yet. It is the



question, are we reaching out to these people? I don't know. There might be a pocket of people that we are missing just because it is online. I haven't really thought about that to be honest.' (Brigitte, Company B, 25.11.2014)

Brigitte explained that there had not been any incident where a jobseeker had complained about inaccessible design. However, as shown above, this might be because disabled people 'gave up' and asked 'what is the point' in trying to access the Internet or inaccessible websites when it was not accessible for them. While this could be an indicator that their practices are accessible, it might also mean that this pool of applicants is so oppressed that they are not able to complain, or the jobseeker would never consider requesting reasonable adjustments out of fear of discrimination when declaring their impairment. This finding demonstrates taken for granted ableist norms, which are embedded within the design of recruitment processes and signifies the unawareness of employers that access to the Internet is still far from being universal. These established norms are that employers assume that the Internet is easy to access, and by using this medium for recruitment, they can remove barriers to accessing people are removed, because everyone is online. As such, by adopting a one-size-fits-all application process, employers will inevitably exclude some groups of jobseekers from access to employment opportunities.

In the same vein, there was also a lack of awareness around the accessibility of employment support services offered by Jobcentre Plus. Some employers took for granted that the organisation will support disabled people with their job searches and applications online. For example, Andrew assumed that online recruitment processes are accessible for the majority of individuals and suggested that people facing barriers could use the Jobcentre.

'You are going to have people that are not going to be able to apply online. You need different ways to attract that talent...For example, Jobcentre, they will support you to make that application. And they do that hand in hand. You book a session with them, [If] I am disabled, [and] I've seen a job, I go to the Jobcentre and they support me and make an application online. They will ask me questions and I will answer them. How much people know about it, I don't think a lot of people do. I think a lot more can be done like two ticks, job centres themselves.' (Andrew, Company A, 25.11.2014)

Here Andrew thought that the Jobcentre was a venue where jobseekers could get help with online applications, but he believed that not everyone was conscious of this support system in place and increased awareness of it was needed. However, when reflecting back on the personal experiences that disabled jobseekers shared within this study, most pointed out that

employment support services at Jobcentre Plus were not tailored to their needs and they were hesitant to use these facilities. Thus, this finding suggests that employers take public employment support services as given when they design their online recruitment processes, but they appear unaware that these public service providers maintain rather than challenge inequalities for disabled jobseekers in the labour market. It implies that this ableist norm (that the Internet is available to everyone in public spaces) is also embedded within the design of online recruitment processes.

When organisations build their online recruitment processes around these established ableist norms, they inevitably overlook that disabled people are more likely to face digital exclusion and are therefore restrained from engaging in online job search activities.

### **Legitimacy of inequalities**

As Acker (2006) explained, the degree of legitimacy of inequities can also vary in organisations. Thus, some employers that follow democratic goals might therefore find inequality unlawful and try to reduce it. Nonetheless, employers are bound by equality law to prohibit discrimination on a range of protected characteristics including disability. Yet, disability inequality in organisations might be legitimatised in practice through rationalisations built around different abilities and negative stereotyping (Acker, 2006; O’Healy et al 2011.). This was apparent in organisations adopting online recruitment processes. Employer respondents justified their rationale for adopting online recruitment processes because it was more cost-efficient than traditional recruitment tools, but also because it was seen as the new norm. This was evident in Greg’s account, who was working for Company D:

‘Well you have to accept that it is the reality of the current recruitment market place and traditional advertising methods have evolved and recruitment is in terms of advertised vacancies online is now the predominant form.’ (Greg, Company D, 15.12.2014)

Greg takes for granted that online recruitment is the reality in the labour market and by using these practices, employers try to legitimise that some jobseekers might not have access to the Internet and participate online without facing barriers (Scholz et al. 2017; Vincente and Lopez, 2010). It would seem that employers try to legitimise their adoption of online recruitment practices, because of an assumption that everyone in society now lives in an online world. However, as seen in the personal experiences of disabled jobseekers in this

study, this virtual environment can be a major structural barrier for individuals during their job searches.

As the interviews progressed it became clear that for a few employers, who did not specifically work with or for disabled people as their core business, the priority of their business was still to challenge gender inequality, rather than disability inequality within their organisation. For instance, Joanne explained that since challenging disability inequality is not mandated from the parent group of her company that has its headquarters outside the UK, they have not prioritised issues around it yet. She explained that:

‘We are just hoping to pick up all of the other fractions [of diversity], but our main target is gender. But ultimately if you make yourself more accessible... if you are making yourself more accessible to women, for example, agile working more flexibility around things like that, than you are naturally going to pick up some other groups in society that need the same level of agility in the approach to work.’ (Joanne, Company F, 02.02.2015)

Her comments seem to legitimise a lack of concern for disabled people and the inequalities that recruitment practices produce, because disability equality was not high on the agenda of the parent company for which she worked. This shows that organisational diversity strategies are often primarily based around a business case rationale that accepts the systems of inequalities within organisations, and more social justice arguments to challenge disability inequality in organisation are ignored or suppressed (Noon, 2007).

### **Control and compliance**

During interviews, employers were asked in what way they monitor their online recruitment processes for disabled jobseekers and the extent to which they are accessible. Employers explained that they had either been working or were in the progress of engaging with external organisations (such as, Ability net or The Clear Company) that audited their recruitment processes. However, there were also a few employers who were unaware whether their recruitment websites and tools were tested. For instance, Dorothy working for Company B, said that she was not sure whether their online application processes were monitored.

‘I don’t think so, I mean I can ask the CSR [Corporate Social Responsibility] team, if it actually was (being monitored), because we are the recruitment team, it would probably come through us and we have to guide them on these practices and develop these with them.’ (Dorothy, Company B, 29.11.2014)

Even though employers have shown a general awareness around the more visible barriers for disabled people during recruitment processes, this finding demonstrates that organisations tend to ignore the monitoring of online recruitment systems for accessibility requirements. Given that disabled jobseekers have faced major obstacles with the inaccessibility of online application processes this step seems essential if organisations are to remove barriers that might hinder individuals from applying for jobs. Thus, organisations maintain, rather than challenge, disability inequality within their online recruitment processes when they fail to monitor accessibility standards.

These steps to monitor should be of even greater importance when employers subcontract their recruitment functions to external vendors. Most employers explained that they outsourced some parts of their recruitment (mostly for their lower skilled jobs) to agencies (e.g. Manpower or Reed) or they advertised positions on job boards (e.g. Universal Jobmatch or Diversity Jobs). Employers pointed out that any service provider that they used was required to comply with the same recruitment standards that they had. However, when asked about whether employers reviewed their agents and examined their services, few employers, admitted that they had done it yet. For instance, Joanne working for Company F said:

‘Today we haven’t, but that is something we are going to be doing. At the moment we are currently reviewing all of our suppliers, asking them to re-tender, this is going to fall part of that tendering process. So this will be what we want, because we going to be going to a diversity audit, we are going to ask our supply change to do the same, just to make sure that there is consistency.’ (Joanne, Company F, 02.02.2015)

Joanne was aware that some of the recruitment agencies might not comply with the same accessibility standards as their company, but she pointed out that this was a process that the employer was aiming to achieve. This finding that employers assume that when they monitor agencies to comply with their own diversity standards, it can inevitably challenge disability inequality throughout the recruitment processes. However, it is more difficult to challenge overt inequality regimes by agencies that have an impact on selection decisions, because these are deeply embedded within cultures or organisational practice.

Other employers emphasised how recruitment practices are not just an isolated role, and how it can involve more than one group of personnel who might not share the same enthusiasm when recruiting disabled people. Therefore, individuals, such as line managers, who are involved in making selection decisions might apply stigma to the abilities of disabled

people, and this makes it more difficult to successfully implement accessible hiring practices. Christian, working for Company A explained:

‘As a recruitment function, we tend to be highly motivated towards those things, like we have the two ticks...But have I implemented voice software? I haven’t. My plan is to get everything done. Can I do it? No. You have recruitment and there they need to be bang on with everything to make it work, you then have line managers, who will always make selection decisions, which then means you will enter the world of sociological preconceptions and stuff like that. You will then have applicants, disabled applicants...So you need 4 parts intentionally to be on board with the same messages. Lining up those 4 parts of a chain to take a straightforward recruitment decision it is very difficult.’ (Christian, Company A, 25.11.2014)

His example of the recruitment process is linked to the nature of organisation he works for and while this might not reflect how smaller to medium size organisations undertake their online recruitment practices, it is unlikely to be uncommon particularly in smaller companies. While he was aware of best practice to achieve equality access in recruitment, by, for example, implementing voice software or simplified application forms, he admitted that in reality it is compromised. He felt that bringing all parties to the same level and acknowledging the importance of diversity is difficult in practice. He suggests that while the recruitment function within his organisation is eager to challenge inequality barriers, in reality implementation is limited. This finding shows that employers may maintain rather than challenge disability inequality within their recruitment processes, because they believe it is impossible to be done

The stories shared in this study highlight that even though employers were positive about hiring disabled people and willing to challenge disability inequality in their recruitment processes, there exists a lack of awareness of social barriers faced by disabled people when organisations adopt a one-size-fits-all application process. While the findings indicate that this unawareness was unintentional, most employers tried to legitimise that disabled jobseekers might experience inequality during job searches and applications, because online recruitment processes were perceived to be the norm. Indeed, only two out of 12 employers pointed out that challenging gender inequality was their main priority of the business, which implies a change in the selective hierarchy in the diversity agenda within organisations. In the interest of making sure that recruitment practices comply with accessibility standards, most employers demonstrated that recruitment processes have been or will be monitored, yet a small number of employers were unaware of their own, but also of agencies fulfilling these accessibility standards. One employer admitted that, while he respected that a recruitment

function might be eager to challenge inequality barriers, in practice implementation was limited, sometimes beyond the bounds of possibility.

## **Conclusion**

Findings suggest that although access to the Internet and a computer was an obvious barrier for some individuals, the inaccessibility or noncompliance of recruitment websites with assistive technology was even more evident for all interviewees in this study. Generally, it can be said that once individuals were able to get access to the Internet, they faced online application processes that were inaccessible to them, and easy read formats or alternative documentations were limited, even sometimes unavailable. Data of this study suggests that these online application processes have been used as a form of pre-selection, because employers adopt socially accepted ideas of the ideal worker to filter out candidates, which are not in line with explicit criteria required for the job advertised. The experiences of discrimination that jobseekers shared show the impact of indirect psycho-emotional disability. Individuals both with visual impairments and with learning difficulties felt unable to engage in online job seeking behaviours irrespective of whether they grew up with the Internet or not, because employers had adopted a one-size-fits-all application process.

Based on disabled jobseekers' and employment advisors' experience mentioned above, it is shown that service providers, like libraries and Job Centre Plus have failed disabled users. Stories demonstrate experiences of disability inequality and a failure to abide with legal anticipatory obligations under the Equality Act 2010 to make their facilities accessible to disabled people (Lawson, 2011). Thus, findings demonstrate that this leads to inequalities for disabled people, when reasonable adjustments to services provided are not anticipated (Easton, 2011a).

Adopting Acker's inequality regimes was helpful in demonstrating that organisational practices can lead to the construction of inequalities (here these inequality processes are referred to together as 'inequality regimes') within organisations based on social relations that produce disability. This framework and the use of the four components helped to uncover that recruitment as an organising process produces disability inequality. Findings imply that while most employers that followed egalitarian goals were aware of potential barriers for disabled jobseekers, others ignored that access to the Internet or accessible public employment support services might not be the norm. Thus, organisations tried to legitimise the experiences of inequalities because they take for granted that everyone in society is able

to participate in this virtual world and online recruitment processes are now the new norm. In general, it can be said that challenging disability inequality in online recruitment processes might not sit high on the diversity agenda for every employer, because they still prioritise more visible inequalities, such as gender, within their organisations.

Summarising this chapter has identified ableist norms that employers take for granted when designing their online recruitment processes. As found in this chapter, these established norms are that the Internet is easy to access, it is available to everyone in accessible public spaces, and by using this medium for recruitment, barriers to access potential employees are removed, since everyone is online. The last empirical chapter investigates how disability inequality produced by recruitment practices can be challenged.

## **Chapter 7: Challenging recruitment processes that produce disability inequality**

This chapter aims to address the last research question about how disability inequality, embedded within recruitment processes, can be challenged. This study situates itself within an equality perspective that helps to shed light on the taken for granted ableist norms embedded within UK based organisations. As found in the previous chapters these established norms are: a worker is productive and able-bodied, the Internet is easy to access, it is available to everyone in accessible public spaces, and by using this medium for recruitment, barriers to access potential employees are removed, since everyone is online. The two previous chapters have shown how social relations with past employers and the inaccessibility of the online recruitment process can lead to indirect and direct experiences of psycho-emotional disablism. By adopting Acker's inequality regimes framework, Chapter 6 has shown that even in organisations that follow egalitarian goals, online recruitment as an organising process can produce disability inequality, because practices are designed around implicit socially accepted ideas about the ideal worker. These findings highlighted some constraints that actors within the HR function had, which shaped their realisation of egalitarian goals. This chapter will ask given how ableist norms are entrenched within recruitment processes, what can be done to challenge them?

The chapter explores change strategies advocated by disabled jobseekers that could help challenge disability inequality and remove social barriers to the recruitment of disabled people. The principle finding is that it is vital to remove the stigma attached to being a disabled person in the labour market, respondents suggest that training and education of what constitutes disability is the means to do it. Moreover, findings highlight that when online application processes and recruitment websites are designed around accessibility standards, technology could support, rather than hinder disabled people during their job searches and applications. The accounts shared within this chapter are structured around these change strategies and include perspectives from disabled jobseekers and employers that work for or with disabled people as their core business. These employers have already implemented proactive equality measures and an anticipatory duty to provide reasonable adjustments that is not yet compulsory for every employer in the labour market. This chapter concludes that disability inequality produced by recruitment as an organising process can be challenged. However, this might require changes in the law and support efforts provided by the state in order to put pressure on all employers to adopt more proactive measures towards making the process of recruitment more inclusive.



## **Removing the stigma attached to being a disabled person**

The previous chapters (5 and 6) presented the analysis of cases where disabled jobseekers opened up about their experiences of discrimination in social relations with past employers or structural barriers during their job searches and applications. These accounts reveal how disabled people face multiple social barriers that intersect and can lead to experiences of indirect and direct psycho-emotional disablism. This section of the chapter begins by reflecting on the ways in which disabled jobseekers have tried to challenge the social barriers that individuals had faced during their job searches and applications. It also considers the perspectives shared by employers within this study and organisational strategies that businesses had adopted to confront disability inequality within their organisational processes.

Disabled jobseekers were asked what they thought employers should do in order to remove the social barriers that they had faced in the labour market. All underlined the importance of challenging stereotypes and negative perceptions. Respondents revealed that the stigma attached to being disabled was the biggest obstacle that they faced during their job searches and in employment. The accounts suggest that removing stigma could be a way to challenge disability inequality embedded in recruitment processes and to provide equal access to employment opportunities. The data revealed a range of perspectives from both disabled jobseekers and employers.

## **Raising disability awareness in organisations**

This section begins by reflecting on the principle change strategy recommended by jobseekers, which was that employers should raise disability awareness within organisations to remove the stigma attached to being a disabled person and that they should have an obligation to provide training courses to do so. These training courses can encourage people to be more aware of their own discriminatory behaviour, but it can also highlight organisational practices that are disabling, and which reasonable adjustments might be required to make the workplace inclusive for disabled people. Training can help encourage employers to acknowledge that organisational practices and processes are designed around ableist norms, and in order to remove any disabling barriers, they can treat disabled people more favourably compared to non-disabled people.

Some interviewees reflected on their experiences of past employment and mentioned that co-workers need to be trained on disability awareness. This was evident in Patricia's account.

Patricia had a visual impairment and was in her 60s, and who had been working as personal assistant for a small company.

‘I can think of what the issues have been at my job or what they were...People need to know that you have a visual impairment and things like saying your name [is important]...because when you have a visual impairment, what you lose is cues that everybody normally uses. And they [your colleagues] go, they look at you, but you don’t know they are looking at you. People talking to you, but you don’t realise they are talking to you. They have to say your name, touching you, telling you they’ve put something down. ‘I’ve just put the tea on the left of your desk.’ So that has to do with blind awareness.’ (Patricia, Jobseeker, 07.01.2015)

Her testimony demonstrates that she had experienced discrimination at work because of the lack of disability awareness encountered by her colleagues and employer. Her account highlights how everyday informal social relations are shaped by socially accepted ableist norms that assume able-bodiedness within organisations, which can lead to experiences of direct psycho-emotional disablism (Reeve, 2014). She suggested that everyone in the workplace should be made aware of a person’s impairment and should be educated on what actions have to be adopted to allow a disabled person to be part of the team.

Moreover, disabled jobseekers perceived that employers should take the responsibility of providing more training courses on disability awareness to remove the stigma that hinders disabled people from getting a job. For instance, Ulrich, who has a visual impairment and is looking for a job as support worker for disabled children suggested:

‘Some form of training courses, you know what I mean. That basically say, if you have a visually impaired employee, they need this...if you have an employee that has Asperger’s, you need to be aware of that. I don't think there is enough of that. And this is why you get these negative attitudes towards disabled people when they try to get a job. Because people don't know, they are not aware and are afraid of it. That is just my personal opinion.’ (Ulrich, Volunteer, interviewed with Gabriel, 31.03. 2015)

Ulrich perceived that training would help combat the negative attitudes that disabled people face during their job searches and applications. He suggests that there should be a source of information other than the employee or the jobseeker to educate employers on disability awareness and the specific reasonable adjustments required that could make the workplace more inclusive. Thus, this finding suggests that in an effort to challenge disability inequality in organisations, it is important that employers are made accountable for the training of their

workforce on disability awareness and that reducing the burden of experiencing discriminatory behaviour at work is not left to the disabled worker.

Taking this into account all employers taking part in this study said that training was vital to raise disability awareness in their organisations, but they pointed out that it was generally provided to line managers or those involved in the recruitment process. While this training might be helpful to challenge the bias of some employees, it does not help challenge the attitudes of co-workers nor the processes of recruitment itself, which can produce disability inequality.

Only employers that worked with or for disabled people as their core business explained that training should be offered to the whole workforce in order to challenge the stigma attached to the attributes of disabled people throughout the organisation. One of these employers, Greg, working for Company D, explained why all new staff in his organisation had to participate in a training course.

‘Well it enables people to understand the social model of disability as opposed to the medical model and it explores cultural attitudes towards disabled people, which impact on and create barriers in employment and in society for disabled people...Obviously, it covers legal duties, the Equality Act, however the approach is more from a good practice perspective...and very much from a social model perspective in terms of looking at the barriers that organisations or employers may have created, which is usually and inadvertently through ignorance. And also, really to get people to change their attitudes and to understand that it is not people's impairment or conditions that limit their ability, but it is actually the lack of understanding or lack of awareness or preparedness on the part of the employer to make adjustments.’ (Greg, Company D, 15.12.2014)

Although he explained that legal requirements are important, the major focus of their training course was to promote a social model of disability perspective in order to challenge attitudes and barriers created by employers and society more widely. This understanding of disability has been vital for the disabled people's movement and as Chapter 3 explained, the social model of disability definition is not yet embedded within the Equality Act 2010. Therefore, within the equality law, disability is equated with impairment rather than being imposed by an ableist society and might not be able to challenge attitudes of employers who rely on this definition. Thus, by adopting the social model perspective, the focus of training is to make sure formal social practices, such as organisational policies or processes, but also informal patterns of everyday social relations, do not disable individuals (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). Greg explained that this understanding is vital and helped create an inclusive and open

organisational culture at company D, where individuals feel empowered to disclose an impairment. He said:

‘So, the awareness of employees who do have conditions or impairments is much higher. That obviously is because they have the confidence to disclose those things to management because of the type of organisation we are. And we have a very open attitude towards recruitment of disabled people and promotion of good employment practice that people feel it is a big part of the culture and it is part of what we are about. They have the confidence to actually disclose conditions...we hope and believe that people are more confident to do that and therefore if people do need support or adjustments they ask for them and they get them’ (Greg, Company D, 15.12.2014)

He explained that training combined with other practices, such as creating a barrier free working environment, could foster an inclusive organisational culture, which encourages the open conversation between jobseekers or employee and employer about any reasonable adjustments required, because individuals feel accepted as workers. This can help challenge the power imbalance between disabled people and employers, and ableist norms that exist during the recruitment process as mentioned in Chapter 5. Since the recruitment process is made inclusive, and job application forms are already accessible for most individuals and if not they are encouraged to request alternatives and get in touch. The aim of this process is to use the personal information shared to fit organisational practices and job design to the individuals’ needs and preferences that allow them to be part of the team and people do not feel it is used against them as part of a selection decision. These findings provide insight into the ways that disabled people’s organisations try to challenge ableist norms in order to foster an inclusive organisational culture. This can create an environment where everyone feels that they have a voice to change the job design and where needs or requirements are accommodated by encouraging open communication with individuals to make the working environment inclusive, which is further discussed in the next section.

These stories show that disabled people believe that managers, but also co-workers should receive more training to be aware of disabling practices and behaviour that might hinder during their job searches and in the workplace. This view was supported by disabled people’s organisation that advocated that training should be offered to the whole workforce, not only to line managers. A social model of disability underpinning of the training course is vital to remove the stigma attached to the attributes of disabled people as a worker, because the law as it stands does not support this view of disability. However, training does not automatically create an inclusive organisational culture (Acker, 2006), but other organisational practices

have to be adopted, such as creating a barrier free working environment, and challenging the stereotype of lower productivity.

### **Changing the stereotype of lower productivity**

The positive experiences of working for an inclusive employer were shared by some disabled jobseekers during the interviews. For instance, Tessa, who was born with a visual impairment, was 60 and was working (part-time) for a social enterprise that employed blind and partially sighted employees explained:

‘I never worked in a place that has been as flexible and to be honest you work, you work harder because of that, you know what I mean. Because it is, because someone is saying to you, you know, we understand [your impairment] and that is fine. You tend to give them more back I think.’ (Tessa, Employee, 03.03.2015)

Tessa explained that having a more inclusive working environment encouraged her to work more efficiently in her job, because she felt accepted as a worker and had received the right accommodation. Her experience highlights how some organisations that predominately work for and hire disabled people try to challenge taken for granted ableist norms centred on ideal qualities and behaviour by implementing a barrier-free working environment where organisational processes and practices are designed around individuals’ needs and requirements. Some of these inclusive organisational practices and policies seem to be important equality interventions that can help disabled employees thrive in their jobs, because these focus on the welfare of the workforce and value the diversity of individual’s talents. The organisational approach adopted supports Williams-Whitt and Taras (2010) argument that employers should not just fit a disabled person into a job that has been designed for someone who is not disabled, but to engage in a genuine approach to fit the job to the individual and their requirements. This approach taken is in line with Foster and Wass’ (2013) analysis of reasonable adjustments that not just individualised compliance with workplace adjustments is important to challenge ableist norms, but employers should also acknowledge that organisational policies, practices and criteria can put a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage, because these are designed around ableist norms.

This was also supported by employers who worked with or for disabled people within this study. For example, Lara, working for Company H acknowledged:

‘Absolutely. Statistics have proven time and time again, reports from McKenzie, we’ve got statistics on the EHRC [Equality and Human Rights Commission] website

[that state that] disabled people stay longer, work harder and are more productive. And have fewer workplace accidents and take less time off sick. These are obviously disabled people that get a job in a culture where they can manage their disability effectively. And it then impacts positively on productivity. Everybody feels included. Value based organisation, respect the individuals, it will be more positive for everybody.' (Lara, Company H, 09.03.2015)

She supported the perspective that employment advisors shared in Chapter 5, that there are inclusive employers out there that support and value the talent of disabled people. Her view suggests that creating an organisational culture that values individuals' differences does not only provide disabled jobseekers the opportunity to feel accepted as workers, but it can have a positive impact on the overall working environment and organisational outcomes. By adopting this approach, employers recognise that formal social practices, such as organisational policies and processes, but also informal patterns of everyday social relations, can disable individuals at work and have to be changed. (Ely, 2000). Thus, employers acknowledge that there is a business case for employing disabled individuals in that valuing individual differences can improve the overall working environment and organisational outcomes (see, Dibben et al. 2002).

The views shared above by jobseekers and employers suggest that when organisations create an inclusive working environment and follow a business case for employing disabled people, it can empower disabled people because they feel accepted as workers on an equal basis with others. This can be a way to remove the stigma attached to the attributes of disabled people as a group and challenge ableist norms embedded in organisations, which assume that disabled people cannot be productive workers. Moreover, adopting this approach can alter the design of recruitment practices to make sure they are designed around individuals' differences and requirements.

### **Challenging disability inequality in the wider labour market**

While providing training for every employee was in line with egalitarian goals that promote a barrier-free working environment and inclusive organisational culture inside the workplace, disabled people's organisations also adopted more proactive measures to challenge disability inequality outside their organisations, as advocates of the disabled people's movement. Yet, they acknowledged that training to external organisations could be a challenge, because ableist mind-sets are deeply embedded within organisations and there is sometimes a resistance to change. For instance, Hanna mentioned that:

‘If we are doing open visual awareness training [to external employers], which I have done...The number of people that come have already an interest, so they are half way there, which is great. But actually, what you want to do is reaching people who have no interest. They are not coming, because they have no interest. Those people are really hard to educate and change their attitudes...I think people are changing, but it is slow.’ (Hanna at Company E, interviewed with Isabel, 15.01.2015)

Her story implies that advocacy organisations, like the above, try to challenge ableist mind-sets by demonstrating to other employers the ways in which organisational practices create disability inequality. It also shows that it was hard for them to reach those people who work within employing organisations that still resist change. While Hanna referred to training courses offered to employers, she also mentioned that her company E undertakes external assessments of the workplace for individuals who acquired an impairment whilst being employed. She reflected on past experiences and said that when she undertook these assessments it was occasionally difficult to change a line manager’s narrow-minded attitude. This finding is in line with Foster and Wass’ (2013) argument that say that it is possible to design an abstract job around the competencies or skills of a non-standard worker. However, that would require a radical change in attitudes of managers, because these adjustments might conflict with the dominant ‘organisational logic’ embedded within the organisation.

On a similar vein, other disabled people’s organisations recognised that some employers are still unaware that their practices or policies are disabling. This was evident in Greg’s account, who was working for company D. He said that:

‘Most employers will have a statement that they are an equal opportunities employer and that they don’t discriminate against people. When we point out practices and policies that we might feel are discriminatory or create barriers [for our jobseekers], usually it comes as a bit of a surprise to them. And in most cases, they are interested and willing to talk about adjustments or changes.’ (Greg, Company D, 15.12.2014)

Greg explained that company D mainly engages with external employers as part of their employment support services offered to disabled jobseekers. He felt that a number of employers are still unaware of practices and policies that can disable jobseekers, but that most employers are open to changes after engaging in a dialogue with them. This finding raises the question of whether certain employers might require more detailed information or guidance on how they can remove barriers to the recruitment of disabled people from outside the organisations. As evidenced in chapter 3, there is already a number of government-funded sources of advice and training available to employers, for instance from the Equality

and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) (Foster and Wass, 2013; Fevre, 2011; Hoque and Noon, 2004). It seems that voluntary measures provided by the UK government to tackle subtle discriminating processes within organisations might not be effective to raise the level of disability awareness in organisations, and additional support efforts outside an organisation might be needed to encourage effective change. Thus, building alliances with organisations that affiliate to the disabled people's movement and endorse the social model perspective, and also trade unions (see, Foster and Fosh, 2010; Hoque and Bacon, 2014), might be a way to educate employers and colleagues on disabling organisational practices or ableist-mind-sets.

From the discussion above, one can understand that disabled jobseekers and employers believe that training and education are vital to remove the stigma attached to the attributes of disabled people. Findings suggest that there is still resistance by some employers in the labour market to acknowledge that their organising processes or cultures produce disability inequality. However, most employers were open to make changes after they were aware of the barriers that their recruitment practices might impose onto disabled people. This suggests that the training courses and consultancy provided by disabled people's organisations that centre on legal compliance, but more predominately on the social model of disability perspective, can help challenge ableist mind-sets and organisational practices that produce disability inequality. The accounts shared offered insights into equality measures adopted by disabled people's organisations that have already taken an anticipatory duty to provide reasonable adjustments to create an inclusive organisational culture, where barriers to application are removed and jobseekers and employees feel confident to disclose an impairment.

Even though training on disability awareness is encouraged by the EHRC (2017) or non-profit organisations (see Selevanera and Whippy, 2015), it is still only a voluntary arrangement in the labour market. Thus, promoting change to challenge disability inequality within organisations and the wider labour market is dependent on further equality interventions by the UK government and equality bodies, such as the EHRC. The findings suggest that disabled people's organisations have been successful in creating an inclusive organisational culture that values individuals' differences and have provided external organisations support to accommodate disabled jobseekers. However, these equality measures might not be enough to remove stigma and raise disability awareness in the wider labour market. Thus, collective measures that involve active support within organisations, but also social movements and



legislative support efforts outside the organisations might be needed to change disability inequality in organisations and in the wider labour market.

The above sections established that successfully removing stigma and raising disability awareness is a holistic approach that involves proactive changes in the whole organisation, to create an inclusive organisational culture that values individual differences. The next section explores how this approach is vital to design an inclusive recruitment process.

### **Making the online recruitment process more inclusive**

The accounts of disabled jobseekers shared in chapter 6 made evident that personal experiences with online recruitment processes differed. The structural barriers faced during job searches and applications were not just related to the inaccessibility of online recruitment processes, but also related to the socio-economic context, such as the unavailability of accessible technological infrastructure at public places (such as, the library or the Jobcentre Plus).

This section takes a closer look at change strategies advocated by individuals with learning difficulties and individuals with visual impairments and the change efforts they feel are necessary to make the recruitment process more inclusive. These suggestions shed light on the need for interventions at a number of levels within organisations and the state. It demonstrates that the use of accessibility guidelines is important to make the online recruitment process more inclusive, but also acknowledges that these accessibility changes might only benefit individuals that have access to the Internet and can use it in the first place.

### **Building an accessible technological infrastructure**

During the interviews, a number of jobseekers highlighted that they had been on a computer course in the past, but they did not learn the IT skills to undertake independent job searches online. Interviewees advocated that it was important that the government offered tailored training courses for disabled people to give them the opportunity to learn the skills needed to engage with job searches on the Internet. For example, Robert, who had a visual impairment, was in his 40s, who had been trained as a printer and had been out of work for over five years, explained:

‘I like to learn. I have been twice on computer courses now. I don’t think they are long enough, for me. I think my lad [son] can pick it up [easily]. You know what I mean? But I think if you [have] got a disability, I think you need more time [on a

computer course], especially if you are blind...I think you need to learn computers, don't you? It is just the new world....Computer courses are not long enough for people with disabilities. I think like, if I was a government, they need to start offering more computer courses.' (Robert, Volunteer, 28.01.2015)

Robert felt that computer usage was now essential in the new world of work and he was keen to improve his skills. However, he said that access to a good IT course was restricted.

Another interviewee pointed out that the course that he had been attending in the past was cancelled due to funding issues. This was evident in Edwards's view, who was in his late 40s and had a learning difficulty and hearing impairment and was working as a cleaner. He said:

Yes. I [only] know how to switch a computer on, [but] a few years ago when I was a crossing control. I did a course at a catholic school. There was a course there and they put me on it. In there they have a computer room; we did a few courses on the computer...and [then] they lost the funding, it all went. (Edward, Employee, interviewed with Annabeth, 16.06.2014)

Edward explained that he had access to a computer course, but the funding was lost, and he had since then had not the opportunity to attend any new course. This not only raises the question about the availability of computer courses, but also demonstrates that government cuts might have an impact on the training opportunities available for individuals. Even though the UK government has acknowledged that action is required to reduce the number of people lacking IT skills (disabled people and non-disabled people alike) and has adopted a recent scheme to encourage digital inclusion (GOV, 2014b; 2017b, c), there is no empirical study that has yet investigated these change measures adopted by the government. As Chapter 3 has shown disabled people are the group that is most affected from digital exclusion (see, Adam and Kreps, 2006; Dobransky and Hargittai, 2006; Vincent and Lopez, 2010; LFS, 2015; Eurostat, 2016; Abscal, 2016; Scholz et al. 2017). Thus, this study raises the question for further analysis to provide a clearer picture of the way that the UK government or equality bodies try to challenge the digital divide that exists in society.

### **Simplifying the design of online application processes**

The change strategies advocated by disabled jobseekers that had access to the Internet or where able to use it for their job searches and application, were related to the design and the accessibility of online application processes. Within this study, the majority of individuals with learning difficulties suggested that employers should design their online applications in

a more accessible way by using easy read versions with simplified text, the use of images or the use of text to speech software. For example, Claire, who had learning difficulties, and was in her 20s and was working in a café, explained that:

‘For the online applications make them easier for people to understand. Not 30 to 40 questions. Maybe 10 questions and give them tick boxes. Tick boxes are easier, [and add] pictures and stuff that explains the questions.’ (Claire, Employee, interviewed with Diana, 03.06.2014)

Her suggestion demonstrates that technology can be used to design an online application form that is more accessible for disabled people, by adopting easy read guidelines that can help individuals to understand information easily. She pointed out that employers could simplify the use of questions on the job application, for instance by considering adding images or text to speech software that reads out any written text, which would help her but also others to grasp the meaning behind the questions asked. In line with this view, some individuals with visual impairments taking part in this study agreed that text to speech software implemented within application processes that read out the questions would help them with understanding and submitting their online job application. This data (supports previous research on Internet access, see, Evett and Brown’s study, 2005) suggests that the use of speech software or the adoption of easy read formats to make online recruitment processes more inclusive, can support individuals with learning difficulties, as well as individuals with visual impairments, during their job applications online

Another recommendation was that employers should consider having two different application forms, one for disabled jobseekers and one for non-disabled jobseekers. This was evident in Kay’s account, who has learning difficulties, was in his late 40s, had a bachelor’s degree in history and was volunteering for a museum.

‘For the online stuff, making sure that they’ve got an application form – disabled and abled. There are so many forms out there. And [a barrier is] that web designers, say ‘Look how smart I am’. I know how smart you are, but how about making a form or a site that we can use, rather than being an artist...’ (Kay, Volunteer, interviewed with Florence, 01.09.2014)

Kay highlighted that the variety of job application forms that exist online are a real barrier for him because the design of the website is inadequate, and the usability of the processes is problematic. Thus, he suggested that employers should design their job application formats and recruitment website in an accessible way for disabled and non-disabled jobseekers. This

data raises the issue that while employers might confirm with the equal treatment approach to equality, by treating everyone the same, employers design online application processes not with the end user in mind, which can impose barriers for disabled jobseekers during their job searches and applications.

Furthermore, individuals with visual impairments suggested that it was not only important for them that employers design the job application form in an accessible format, but that recruitment websites comply with assistive technology. For instance, Ulrich who had a visual impairment and was in his 30 clarified that:

‘I mean, I think basically they need to have it simple. It is all well and good that looks nice and we’ll do that. But sorry it might not really work when you can’t see. And if Jaws [software] doesn't like the graphics, if they use some form of cookies [user tracking software], the website doesn't really like, it is going to be inaccessible. Keep it simple.’ (Ulrich, Volunteer, interviewed with Gabriel, 31.03.2015)

His view indicates that some recruitment websites do not meet the accessibility standards that support the use of ICTs, such as screen readers, which inevitably can put a disabled user at a disadvantage. Thus, this finding again presents the issue of inaccessible design and that online recruitment processes encountered during job searches and application have not been designed to anticipate the needs of disabled jobseekers, as the information provided was not accessible for them.

Research has shown that it is possible to design ICTs, including applications and services, in a way to avoid or minimise the barriers for disabled people accessing them; for instance, by using universal accessibility guidelines and tools by the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI/W3W) (Lewthwaite, 2014; Abscal et al. 2016). The change strategies of some jobseekers also support Evett and Brown’s study (2005), which suggests that the use of adopting universal accessibility guidelines can be beneficial for both, individuals with visual impairments and individuals with learning difficulties, thus it can be suggested that it could make the online recruitment processes more inclusive. However, Lewthwaite (2014) and Abscal et al. (2016) point out that universal standards alone cannot ‘fix’ disability, because barriers to access are complex and depend on the individuals’ context and type of impairment.

Employers within this study that had already made their online practices more inclusive acknowledged these structural barriers that disabled jobseekers might face when engaging with online recruitment processes during their job searches and applications online. They

explained that it was therefore important to monitor recruitment websites or online application processes consistently to make sure they are inclusive. For instance, Lara, said:

‘[If you use] technology, get it tested by a disabled user panel. This is the only way to know whether the technology works for disabled people and they can use it. You can run programmes to check it against the World’s accessibility guidelines. But the only real way to find it out is to get a disabled user panel to test it for you.’ (Lara, Company H, 09.03.2015)

Her account suggests that when employers want to challenge that their online recruitment processes are disabling, they could involve disabled users in the co-design of these practices to remove any barriers to application.

This finding provides insight into one strategy adopted by employers that work for or with disabled people that have made their online recruitment processes inclusive. It supports the literature (Cooper et al. 2012; Lewthwaite, 2014) that suggests that accessibility should be viewed as a relational process that views accessibility as a property of the relation between users and the resource and acknowledges the unequal power structures that create disability and accessibility. This approach takes into account the importance of cultural, social, political and other ‘real world’ issues that govern who can and cannot access digital resources to make sure that those that are most marginalised are empowered and enabled online (Lewthwaite, 2014). While it is important that recruitment websites are designed with accessibility standards in mind, structural barriers can only be challenged, when disabled people test and design the technology used on a regular basis.

### **Keeping the personal touch within recruitment**

As the interviews progressed, some respondents perceived that the change from the traditional recruitment tools towards the use of the Internet as a medium for recruitment had inevitably changed the way that employers communicate with applicants. As a result, jobseekers felt obligated to engage in predominantly text-based rather than verbal communication during job searches and applications. This was a challenge for some of the individuals within this study and they recommended that there should be a possibility of contacting the prospective employer by telephone to ask for advice or to request any additional adjustments. For instance, Bethany who was in her late 20s and had a visual impairment and learning difficulty explained that:

‘People [should] talk to us more and not singling us out. They [employers] just expect us to go on computers constantly. Sometimes it can be too much. There is no conversation. Everything is just on the computer that is not good... they don’t want to use phones anymore; they don’t want to talk with people. It is isolating...They could talk more with people. Is that not what they were supposed to do? It is all computer based now...I think the government should learn to talk to people more and to understand that we are not robots.’ (Bethany, Volunteer, interviewed with Annabeth, 02.06.2016)

Bethany opened up about her past experience of facing social relations with the public that were disabling and she felt that employers and the government speak and treat her differently, because of her impairment. Her story conveys the way that this development of moving recruitment practices towards the virtual world has put some disabled people at a considerable disadvantage, because the online application process relies predominately on text-based communication. As noted in Chapter 3, employers use online recruitment processes to reach a wider pool of applicants, but the downside of this approach is the oversupply of applications (Galanaki, 2002; Chapman et al. 2003; Lee, 2011). Thus, employers make use of automatic systems and technologies to sift out the scale of candidates, which can impose barriers for jobseekers, see Chapter 6, but it has also the effect that recruitment processes lose the ‘personal touch’ and face-to-face interactions (Cappeli, 2001; Barber, 2006; Schullery et al. 2009). A way of addressing the tension between a demand for bespoke communication and the scale of the numbers of applicants could be to provide a way to request to speak with someone personally to humanise the recruitment process. It could offer jobseekers the chance to interact with employers in a spoken mode of communication during the recruitment process in case they require any advice or support during their job applications.

One alternative option mentioned by disabled jobseekers during the interviews was that employers could offer jobseekers the choice to do a telephone application rather than a written job application. This alternative way of recruiting was pointed out by Tessa, who had a visual impairment and was in her 60s.

‘In the application stage, where you actually find out about the job, I think it would be better if they would do more telephone applications and things like that. So that you can actually speak with somebody, and they could perhaps fill in the form on the other end. That would be quite helpful. And really being a lot more open minded. Giving people a chance really.’ (Tessa, Employee, 03.03.2015)

Her argument suggests that the online recruitment process should involve a human interaction where disabled people can engage with employers or those in charge of the recruitment function and could request support with their job application if required. By giving jobseekers the choice, the online recruitment process could be made more inclusive, especially for those individuals who might struggle to fill in a written online job application online. This finding suggests that a spoken way of application can be an alternative approach that can support some individuals with their application and can make the online recruitment process more inclusive.

The perspectives shared by individuals with learning difficulties and individuals with visual impairments show that the majority of change strategies advocated by disabled jobseekers support previous research on access to the Internet (see Pilling et al. 2004; Adam and Kreps, 2006; Harris, 2010; Waitling, 2011). The data demonstrates that disabled people are a heterogeneous group and that social barriers experienced during job searches and applications are unique in relation to an individual's own context and form of impairment. Disabled jobseekers that did not have access to the Internet, or could use it, advocated that the UK government should make technological infrastructure at public spaces (see, Chapter 6), but also tailored computer training available to them, to provide equal access to employment opportunities online. Likewise, interviewees recommended a variety of reasonable adjustments to employers, which included technological solutions, but also ways of humanising the use of these online systems that would make the online recruitment process more inclusive. Nonetheless, the findings provide insights that online recruitment should not be viewed as a one size fits all application process, because barriers can be unique in relation to an individual's own context and form of impairment, and compliance with accessibility standards alone might not make online recruitment more inclusive.

The last section of this chapter considers the ways in which organisations that work with or for disabled people as their core business have designed their recruitment processes to provide equal access to employment opportunities. It suggests that external support efforts by the UK government or equality bodies, such as the EHRC, combined with active support from within organisations are needed to successfully challenge the ways in which recruitment processes produce disability inequality.

## **Viewing recruitment as relational processes to challenge disability inequality**

Within this study, organisations that worked with or for disabled people as their core business shared why they believed that their online recruitment processes were inclusive for disabled people. All three employers acknowledged that recruitment should involve communication with jobseekers throughout the whole process to make sure that any barriers to application are removed. For instance, Isabel from Company E explained that:

‘We don’t operate an online system in the respect that we expect people to apply online. The vacancies are advertised on our website, but rather than asking people to apply on some online system, they can download the application form, they can download all the information, it is available in different formats...And you know you literally email it back, it is also mentioned there clearly with that, even if you are struggling in any way please give us a call. So, all through that process, people are encouraged, if you can’t just download the application form, you can get in touch with us.’ (Isabel, at Company E, interviewed with Hanna, 15.01.2015)

As a disabled people’s organisation, its website has been developed with the needs of disabled people in mind and it follows web accessibility guidelines and regular monitoring evaluations. Rather than designing an accessible online application system, which could be an alternative way, jobseekers are encouraged to fill in a job application form in Word (available in easy read or other accessible formats) and send it back to the employer via email or post. This shows how recruitment processes can be designed with the needs of applicants in mind that offers the flexibility to make further adjustments. Likewise, the process adopted here involves either written or verbal communication with jobseekers during the recruitment process, and the company encourages individuals to get in touch if they face any barriers to application or required any additional information or formats. The findings suggest that although this employer had sought to anticipate any substantial disadvantage that disabled people might face, the direct contact with jobseekers was seen as vital during the online recruitment process as a way to respond to individual needs. This organisation recognised that the requirements and needs of every applicant are dependent on their own particular context and form of impairment.

Moreover, employers (company D and H) also said that they had adopted a policy of open recruitment, which meant that the whole recruitment process from the job analysis to the selection decision has been designed to be transparent for jobseeker by actively engaging with them by establishing a relationship throughout the process and providing them with



any information needed. This can be achieved by offering jobseekers the chance to get in touch with the employer during the recruitment process.

In addition, employers had shared any job opportunities with their networks, which included other disabled people's organisations, but also accessible job boards. For instance, Lara explained that:

'First, what we do is job analysis. We would analyse the role and write the job description. Clearly following our own best practice guidelines, in terms of inclusive language and terms. We don't have any desirable criteria, because we don't believe in it. So, we just have the core criteria. We feel it is really important that the candidate knows as much about the competencies what we will measure them to give them the best opportunity to mark their skills. So, we have a very, very, open documentation, about our jobs. We tell them everything. So, it would go up on our website and our careers page, and we would also circulate through our networks, which is obviously that is why we get quite a lot of disabled candidates, because we have networks with disabled people.' (Lara, Company H, 09.03.2015)

Here Lara explained that open recruitment processes aims to remove any desirable criteria from the person specification to remove any skill or attribute that is not relevant for the job, and to advertise through accessible media. This meant that job applicants would know from the start of the application whether they had the right skills to do the job and which skills would be assessed throughout the whole recruitment process. Moreover, the job position would be sent out to their networks to provide more people the chance to be aware of the position advertised.

The stories shared suggest that when recruitment is viewed as a relational process, employers acknowledge that engagement with recruitment processes can vary for each individual and their individual context, and the contact between jobseeker and employer can ensure that barriers to application can be removed. The findings show that employers who work for or with disabled people tried to challenge ableist norms of the ideal worker embedded within the job design and recruitment processes. However, by moving traditional practices to the Internet, additional barriers have been created for some jobseekers who are less able to access the Internet or able to use it for their job searches and applications, which have to be taken into consideration. The findings of this study raise the question for further investigation, because compliance to accessibility standards and open and fair communication throughout the recruitment process alone might not be enough to make practices more inclusive for everyone. When employers adopt online recruitment practices, they ignore socio-economic

contexts, such as the availability of accessible technological infrastructure at public places or computer training, which excludes some jobseekers from accessing employment opportunities in the first instance. Active support from inside organisations alone might not be enough to challenge ableist norms to provide equal access to employment, and further support efforts from outside by the UK government or equality bodies, are needed to successfully challenge disability inequality in the wider labour market.

## **Conclusion**

From the above one can comprehend that offering training on disability awareness is seen as helpful to challenge the stigma attached to the attributes of disabled people and highlight the real barriers that hinder individuals from being productive workers. Findings suggest that the training courses provided by disabled people's organisations that focus on the social model of disability perspective, could challenge ableist mind-sets and organisational practices that produce disability inequality, because these focus on removing barriers that are created by organisations and individuals' attitudes. Thus, training in line with creating a barrier free working environment, and challenging the stereotype of lower productivity, can foster a more inclusive organisational culture where jobseekers are confident to disclose an impairment to receive the right adjustments to fit the job around their needs and requirements. Yet, given that training on disability awareness is still a voluntary act undertaken by employers, and the social model of disability has not yet been implemented into the Equality Act 2010, promoting change to challenge disability inequality within organisations and the wider labour market is highly dependent on further equality intervention. For instance, by implementing more proactive approaches to create disability awareness, by the UK government or equality bodies, such as the EHRC.

This research demonstrates that with the change from traditional to online recruitment and selection practices, the job applications have become more complex, and involve the use of online applications processes, which are not accessible for disabled people. It suggests that some jobseekers are still excluded from engaging in job searches and applications online, because of the lack of an accessible technological infrastructure or computer training available to the public (Easton, 2013; Abscal et al. 2016). This again requires further change efforts from outside the organisation by the UK government or equality bodies, such as the EHRC, to provide everyone the chance to engage with job searches and applications online.

Moreover, disabled jobseekers, who were able to use the Internet for their job search activities recommended a variety of reasonable adjustments, which included technological solutions, but also ways of humanising the use of these online systems. As it stands this duty to make reasonable adjustments in the employment context under the Equality Act 2010 is reliant on a reactive a responsive nature by employers. However, assuming that there is a shift in the law and this duty is made anticipatory, these recommendations by interviewees could make the online recruitment process more inclusive for disabled people. Findings imply that technology could be used to the advantage of disabled jobseekers, but online recruitment should not be viewed as a one-size-fits-all application process, that is based on the dominant equal treatment approaches to recruitment, because barriers depend on the individuals' context and type of impairment. Thus, the accessibility of online application processes has to be assessed by disabled users on a regular basis as part of a relational process, to make sure barriers to application, such as inaccessible online application, or difficult terminology commonly used, can be removed (Cooper et al. 2012; Lewthwaite, 2014).

The data shared by organisations that work for or with disabled people as their core business, shows that they have already adopted the anticipatory duty to make reasonable adjustments. These proactive practices show that when recruitment is viewed as a relational process, employers consider the relationship between jobseekers and their online recruitment process in context, which can vary for each individual and their type of impairment. Moreover, these practices depend on the direct contact between jobseeker and employer that can raise awareness of any barriers to application and then relies a proactive response of the employer. However, the change from traditional to online recruitment has created new barriers for some jobseekers, who are less able to access the Internet or able to use it, which have to be taken into consideration when adopting these online processes.

It can be argued that online recruitment, as an organising process, is likely to produce disability inequality. Organisations vary in the practices and processes that they use to achieve their organisational goals; and, disability inequalities are produced both informally and informally as these work processes are carried out. One of these practices is the process of recruitment, in which practices are designed based on the taken for granted norm of the ideal worker to find the most suitable person for the positions. These ableist norms might be hard to challenge. However, employers that work with or for disabled people have demonstrated that organisations have been able to challenge discriminatory recruitment practices that produce disability inequality. They have willingly adopted proactive measures and the anticipatory duty to provide reasonable adjustments, to design their recruitment processes as

a relational approach that focuses on building open relations between jobseekers and employer. This suggests that when the duty is made anticipatory within the equality law by the UK government, it might pressure that all employers adopt more proactive measures to challenge that the process recruitment produces disability inequality.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion, findings and implications for further research**

This thesis has identified the social barriers that disabled people have to face when they search or apply for a job in the labour market. It has shown that the social relational view of disability is helpful at both the macro and micro social scales in understanding social exclusion associated with relationships between impaired and non-impaired people, which has the potential for bringing insights into the personal experiences of disability. This study demonstrates that disability can be experienced by individuals on a more personal and emotional level, which can lead to different experiences of disability. These personal experiences of disability might hinder individuals to sustain employment, in interaction with the 'outer' barriers that they experience, as a disabled person. When social barriers imposed by the recruitment process are looked at through an extended social relational view of disability, as opposed to the social model of disability, new insights are gained into direct and indirect experiences of psycho-emotional disablism that might affect some disabled people when they undertake job searches and applications. Psycho-emotional disablism undermines the emotional wellbeing of individuals with impairments, which can lead to 'inner' barriers that impact on individuals' self-confidence and their view of self as a worker. This emotional background that disabled people might bring to the job search is important to acknowledge, because experiences with past employers or colleagues and the recruitment process can also have a direct impact on the way individuals engage with recruitment processes and practices, during their job searches and applications. It is these interactions that people have with each other and organisations that need to be understood, because the material spaces for the exclusion and inclusion of disabled people are created in the way that organisations respond to structural barriers.

Thus, this thesis has shown that disability is not 'natural' or given, but like gender, it is socially constructed and performed daily in processes and practices in organisations and also in many other settings and social relations in society. The recruitment literature is only at the beginning of viewing recruitment as a social process, where the interactions between the recruiting organisation and the jobseeker during this process are further investigated to provide insight into the way power relationships are established and recruitment practices are built. This study was led by disabled people and the disability studies literature rather than the recruitment literature. Thus, the research was able to discover these deeper experiences of disablement in form of direct and indirect psycho-emotional disablism that jobseekers had experienced in the labour market, in interaction with organisations and during their job

searches online, which were previously absent within organisational and management literature.

Likewise, this thesis has demonstrated that the concept of ableism has been helpful to unpick taken for granted ableist norms of the ideal worker, which are currently deeply embedded within the recruitment process thus producing disability inequality. Some disabled people have internalised these ableist norms embedded within society and experienced internalised ableism. The established ableist norms found in this study, which are deemed to be problematic for disabled people are that a worker is productive and able-bodied; the Internet is easy to access; it is available to everyone in accessible public spaces; and by using this medium for recruitment, barriers to access potential employees are removed, since everyone is online. This chapter attempts to draw together and summarise the findings from the empirical chapters and evaluates the key contribution made by this thesis. Further, it assesses the contribution made to scholarship in the fields of disability and management studies.

The research began by evaluating the disability literature within the context of debates around disability and ableism. This provided the basis from which to explore how the implementation of different theoretical perspectives reveal in what way organisational practices favour certain abilities over others and consider these to be the norm. Chapter 2 investigated the meaning of disability from a historical perspective and contrasted the divide between the two principle models of disability—the social and the medical models. The literature review indicated that, in general, understanding the concerns of individuals with learning difficulties and visual impairments from the perspective of the social model of disability standpoint have been scarce. Thus, this study has attempted to rectify this gap and to give voice to these people by representing their experiences of disability of the labour market and in interactions with organisations. The thesis has demonstrated that it is not only the public experiences of disability at the macro level, but also the personal experiences of disability at the micro level, in form of direct and indirect psycho-emotional disablism that can exclude someone from employment as effectively as solely structural disablism, as identified by social modelists. This thesis has contributed to an understanding of disability from the view of the extended social relational model of disability and has shown that these different levels of analysis interact. This study has added to the literature that views disability as socially constructed by demonstrating the more personal experiences of disability that individuals with impairments encounter during their job searches and applications online.

Previous research has indicated that ableist norms and assumptions are evident in dominant practices, processes and beliefs of certain social groups and social structures that value and promote certain abilities over others (Wolbring, 2008). This thesis has contributed to the growing debates in the disability and organisational and management literature as mentioned in Chapter 3 by using the concept of ableism and the experience of internalised ableism, in particular, in its analytical framework. This has helped to uncover that ableist beliefs are evident in employers' recruitment practices. In particular, the concept of the ideal worker, which takes as its norm a male who is rational, a strong leader, committed to work, and free from family, or other responsibilities (Acker, 1990; Collinson and Hearn, 1996; Williams, 2000; Martin, 2003), and this norm has underlined approaches to job design and organisations. This thesis has highlighted that the ideas around ideal qualities and behaviour of worker are not just a 'real abstraction' (Foster and Wass, 2013; Ganberg, 2015; Jammaers et al. 2016), based on ableist norms embedded in society and organisations, but these norms appear to have material consequences for and shape the actions, self-perceptions and resources available of disabled people as workers. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were undertaken for this study with disabled jobseekers, employment advisors from two disabled people's organisations, and employers, who have engaged in ways to challenge disability inequality within their recruitment practices. These provided an opportunity to assess how the concept of the ideal worker can be a real barrier for jobseekers, because it is deeply embedded within society and the design of recruitment practices.

The particular theoretical perspective adopted in this thesis is different from previous research undertaken on disabled people's approaches to employment and their experiences with recruitment practices. Traditionally viewed from within the social model of disability, research was predominately concerned with highlighting practices and production of disablism, especially, structural barriers that contribute to the marginalisation of disabled people within society (Oliver, 1996, Barnes and Mercer, 2004). In recent years, research has emerged that has applied ableism as a concept to organisational research that focused on exploring how acts and behaviours in organisations assume that an individual has to meet the physical standards set by a certain group in society (Jammaers et al. 2016). This thesis has added to the growing theoretical debate in the literature that criticises the technocratic way that organisational practices, here the online recruitment process, are designed. There is the predominant belief in the recruitment literature that these practices are fair and objective, however by using the concept of ableism as an analytical tool this study has highlighted that these preferred ableist traits of the ideal worker are embedded within recruitment practices.

As such disabled people have to adopt response strategies during their job searches and applications online to challenge these ableist norms. This study takes into account the unequal power relationship between employer and employee, but acknowledges that disabled jobseekers are able to challenge, at least to some extent, ableist organisational practices.

Consequently, this thesis has built on the emerging organisational and management literature, by adding to this theoretical debate by adopting the concept of ableism and the extended social model of disability, which has challenged the view that organisations are neutral in their design and exposed that disability, needs to be understood, not as characteristics of individual workers, but as an integral part of the organisational culture itself (Harlan and Robert, 1998; Williams and Marvin, 2012; Foster and Wass, 2013). Acker's (2006) conceptual tool has been useful here to demonstrate that social barriers in form of disability inequality occur within recruitment practices and they can be understood within the context of inequality regimes. The analytical tool helped to shed light on a number of sometimes apparently neutral practices in the recruitment process that produce disability inequality. This study has used the concept of inequality regimes to investigate the process of recruitment, not only from the perspective of one case organisation, but it has acknowledged experiences and views of multiple actors (including disabled jobseekers, private sector employers and non-profit organisations, such as disabled people's organisations that provide employment support) to show the wider impact that these recruitment practices can have on disabled people in the labour market.

### **Extending inequality regimes: disability an inequality dimension**

The research began by answering the first research question (see Chapter 5), which asked to what extent, is disability experienced by people with impairments in the labour market and in interaction with organisations? From the stories told by disabled jobseekers, what seems to be apparent is the fact that most employers that they had encountered during past employment or job searches had adopted discriminatory behaviour towards disabled people and their abilities.

While organisations within this study had a positive view of disabled people as workers, the majority of employers have adopted a medicalised view of disability, in line with the Equality Act 2010, which indicates what individuals are unable to do, rather than what they could do if they had the right support. Employer accounts reflected the socially constructed nature of work and the search for ideal qualities and behaviour in workers (Alvesson and Willmott,



1992; Granberg, 2015). This ideal worker is an abstraction that can lead to material consequences for individuals in the labour market and in interaction with organisations, because it devalues the ability of disabled people. Indeed, the view of workers is based on a comparison with ableist attributes, and this can impact on an individual's view of self.

Data revealed that relationships that jobseekers had with past employers, led to experiences of direct psycho-emotional disablism, and this then impacted on their views of self as a worker and their job search strategies. The majority of disabled people that took part in this study referred to their impairments as an individual barrier to work and had also adopted ableist norms in order to ease the experiences of direct psycho-emotional disablism, as a way of 'passive resistance' to protect oneself from actions or attitudes adopted by others (Schlossberg, 2001). This meant that some jobseekers who were born with an impairment engaging in ways of 'passing' to fit into the ableist norms (Brune and Wilson, 2013), whereas a number of jobseekers who acquired their impairment later in life shared experiences of 'internalised ableism' where they questioned their own ability compared to the metaphoric ideal type version of self (Campbell, 2009).

The visibility of disability inequality in the labour market was evident when disabled jobseekers shared their experiences of declaring disability on a job application. This highlighted the unequal power balance between employers and jobseekers and constrained an individual's choice of disclosure. For the majority of disabled people interviewed, the personal experience of discrimination in the past influenced an individual's decision to declare a disability on a job application because of fear of discrimination. Thus, they engaged in personal strategies around disclosure, but also concealment.

While Section 60 of the Equality Act 2010 was implemented to challenge the unconscious bias or stigma impacting on a recruitment decision, findings highlight that most jobseekers within this study felt that declaring that they are disabled (in line with the Equality Act 2010 definition) was an obligation rather than choice in order that they might receive reasonable adjustments during interviews or pre-tests. Thus, section 60 ignores that when employers ask jobseekers whether or not they would require a reasonable adjustment it is an indirect way of asking for disclosure, which puts disabled jobseekers in a dilemma because they fear that discrimination will take place. Thus, this section of the Act misjudges how employers implement this section. It tries to treat jobseekers differently that they can request reasonable adjustments, but at the same time approaches it from the equal treatment approach that asking for disclosure of an individual's health or disability is permitted to prevent that it is

used as irrelevant selection criteria. Consequently, this legal tool that is formed around an equal treatment approach to recruitment has not been able to challenge disability discrimination and more proactive measures and differential treatment approaches to recruitment are required.

Employment advisors that encouraged disabled jobseekers to disclose also adopted this view. They believed there are inclusive employers out there that are genuine in their support for disabled workers and that would not discriminate against jobseekers who declare an impairment on their job application. Although encouragement to disclose was formed by good intention in order to get individuals into employment, it nevertheless takes away the person's choice of whether or not they would like to disclose an impairment to the employer and might direct people towards certain employers.

The findings from employers show that most were aware that direct questions about asking for disclosure were to some extent permitted under section 60 of the Equality Act, but some acknowledged that using the wording of reasonable adjustments was an indirect way of obligating a person to disclose an impairment. Although employers taking part in this study appeared genuine about offering support, they thought that other employers might not be open to recruit disabled people and could use the information as implicit selection criteria during the recruitment process. In fact, employers mentioned that the duty to provide reasonable adjustments was in practice not widely understood by most employers because it was seen as a reminder that disabled employees would be costly, despite the availability of the Access to Work Scheme. This financial scheme, offered by the government, was questioned by employers taking part in this study, as to whether or not it has helped employers with the process of providing reasonable adjustments, making the working environment more inclusive and challenged the myth around the costs of recruiting disabled people.

Moreover, while most employers within this study had adopted proactive approaches to the recruitment of disabled people, such as the 'Two Tick' scheme, which offered a way to ask direct questions about a person's health, they believed that this approach was inconsistent and difficult to sustain. Evidently, data suggests that the process of disclosing is flawed and the misuse of personal data shared by jobseekers and negative encounters with past employers made the process of declaring problematic for many. The only way that this study was able to understand these experiences has been through an extended social relational approach of disability, because it is not just the processes itself that discriminate against

disabled people, but it is also past experiences that individuals bring with themselves to the recruitment process that can lead to personal experiences of disability during their job searches and applications. This has been the unique contribution of this study by creating a space to explore social relations with non-disability, as assumed able-bodied, normative expectation and individual responses to these social barriers not yet included in social model research. While jobseekers might be able to choose at what time they declare an impairment to employers, they are unable to challenge the power imbalances that employers have over their personal information during the recruitment process itself.

### **Online recruitment processes: accessibility challenges for disabled jobseekers**

Furthermore, this thesis has contributed to the emerging recruitment literature that views recruitment not as a technocratic, but a social process that focuses particularly on investigating the social interaction between both parties, the jobseeker and the recruiting organisation and the design of the online recruitment process (Searle, 2009; Byron et al. 2013). Thus, the findings add to the literature on the engagement of jobseekers with web-based recruitment practices from an equality perspective (Kuhn and Skuterrud, 2000; Wallace et al. 2000) and has shown that other actors such as the state can also influence how the recruitment process is experienced. In particular, the impact of disability inequality and job searches online (see Chapter 6). The research has demonstrated the way in which disabled people engage with online recruitment and selection processes. Further to this, it has also answered the question of whether or not employers consider the impact of social barriers to the recruitment of disabled people on the Internet.

This study suggests that online recruitment processes leave many obstacles for disabled people. In particular, the visibility of inequalities within the labour market has been evident when employers adopt a one-size-fits-all application process that ignores unequal access to the Internet for disabled people. Findings suggest that although access to the Internet and a computer was an obvious barrier for some individuals, the inaccessibility or noncompliance of recruitment websites with assistive technology was even more evident for all participants in this study. Generally, it can be said that once disabled people were able to get access to the Internet, they found online application processes that were inaccessible to them, and easy read formats or alternative documentations were limited, even sometimes unavailable. Data suggests that these online application processes have been used as a form of pre-selection (now part of the recruitment process), because employers adopt socially accepted ideas of the ideal worker to filter out candidates, which might not be in line with formal criteria

required for the job advertised. These experiences of disability inequality that jobseekers shared show the impact of indirect psycho-emotional disablism. Individuals felt unable to search or apply for a job and inevitably stopped engaging in online job seeking behaviours, because employers had adopted recruitment processes that were not inclusive or enabled their participation.

Based on the experiences of disabled jobseekers and employment advisors one can conclude that public facilities such as the library or Jobcentre Plus that should have the capacity to provide 'free' Internet access on computers, were under resourced and are failing disabled users. Stories demonstrate experiences of disability inequality and a failure of public service providers to abide to their anticipatory legal obligations as service providers under the Equality Act 2010 (Lawson, 2011). Thus, lack of appropriate facilities in libraries or Jobcentres can lead to inequalities for disabled people, when the services provided are not designed with disabled end users in mind (Acker, 2006; Easton, 2011).

Findings show that while most employers within this study who followed egalitarian goals were aware of potential barriers for disabled jobseekers, others ignored the fact that access to the Internet or accessible technological infrastructure, including public employment support services, might not be the norm. Thus, organisations take for granted that every jobseeker is able to participate in this virtual world and online recruitment practices are now the new norm. In general, this study has found that challenging disability inequality in online recruitment processes might not sit high on the diversity agenda for every employer.

### **Challenging disability inequality: A need for a relational and human rights approach to recruitment?**

Lastly, this thesis has explored the ways in which disability inequality that is embedded within the recruitment process and practices could be challenged through greater awareness of the use of socially acceptable ableist norms to make judgements on ability (Chapter 7). This study builds on the law literature that suggests the current Equality Act 2010 definition of disability should include the social dimension of disability and to modify the reasonable adjustment duty to be proactive in the employment context (Lawson, 2011; Solanke, 2017). This might challenge the assumptions that underpin the equality law and rethink the legal framework around disability. This is vital to challenge disability inequality and ableist norms that are embedded within the organisation of work and in the wider labour market.

The contribution of this study is not just theoretical as mentioned above, but also practical. This means that the research has not only demonstrated how disability is experienced by individuals with visual impairments and learning difficulties in the labour market and in interactions with organisations, but this study was also led by disabled people and their organisations. Thus, the research findings present change strategies advocated by disabled jobseekers and employers that work for or with disabled people as their core business, which can provide practical guidance to organisations and the government.

The primary change strategy advocated by disabled jobseekers and disabled people's organisations that training and education of employers is vital to remove stigma, and that the online recruitment process should be made more inclusive and accessible (see Chapter 7). Even though all employers within this study agreed that training is important, courses offered were only mandatory for line managers or those responsible for recruitment. In the case of disabled people's organisations, training on disability awareness was offered to the whole workforce and focused on legal compliance, but more predominately on the social model to challenge ableist mind-sets around the stigma attached to the attributes of disabled people. Findings suggest that this had fostered an inclusive organisational culture where jobseekers were confident to disclose an impairment to receive the right adjustments in order to fit the job around their needs and requirements (Williams-Whitt and Taras, 2010). By creating an inclusive organisational culture employers can empower disabled people to feel accepted as workers on an equal basis with others. This can be a way to remove the stigma attached to the attributes of disabled people as a group and challenge ableist norms embedded in organisations, which assume that disabled people cannot be productive workers.

In addition to this, the data provided insight into training courses and advice that disabled people's organisations had provided to external employers, as advocates of the disabled people's movement. These interactions demonstrated that some employers or line managers were still resistant to change, but that most organisations were open to make adjustments to any disabling practices once barriers were pointed out. This finding raises the question of whether employers might require more detailed information or guidance on how to remove barriers to the recruitment of disabled people from outside their organisation. Thus, building alliances with organisations that affiliate to the disabled people's movement and which endorse the social model perspective might be an alternative approach that can be adopted to educate but also to monitor that employers and colleagues on disabling organisational practices or ableist-mind-sets. Key actors, such as disabled people's organisations, play a vital role in challenging disability inequality in the labour market.

A second change strategy advocated by disabled jobseekers was that job applications had become more complex and involved the use of online applications processes that were not accessible for most individuals within this study. Some jobseekers explained that they were excluded from engaging in job searches and applications online, because of the lack of accessible technological infrastructure (see, Chapter 6) or computer training available to the public (Easton, 2013; Abscal et al. 2016). Moreover, for individuals, who were able to use the Internet for their job search activities, recommended a variety of reasonable adjustments, which included technological solutions, but also ways of humanising the use of these online systems that would make the online recruitment process more inclusive for disabled people. The findings of this study show that most jobseekers had to request reasonable adjustments during the recruitment process (see Chapter 5 and 6) and while some had asked for them during the process, application of it by past employers was weak or sometimes not available. Findings show that technology could be used to the advantage of disabled jobseekers, but online recruitment should not be viewed as a one size fits all application process, but as a relational process, to acknowledge that accessibility barriers depend on the individual's context and type of impairment (Cooper et al. 2012; Lewthwaite, 2014).

The data on changed strategies shared by employers who work with or for disabled people as their core business suggest that when recruitment is viewed as a relational process, employers acknowledge that engagement with recruitment processes can vary for each individual and their individual context, and the contact between jobseeker and employer can ensure that any barriers throughout the whole recruitment process are removed. The findings of this study raise the question for further investigation, because compliance to accessibility standards and open and fair communication throughout the recruitment process alone might not be enough to make practices more inclusive for everyone. Although employers try to challenge ableist norms within the job design and throughout the recruitment process, they have to acknowledge that by adopting online recruitment practices, socio-economic contexts, such as the availability of accessible technological infrastructure at public places or computer training, can exclude some jobseekers from accessing employment opportunities in the first instance.

This thesis argues that online recruitment, as an organising process, is likely to produce disability inequality when employers, who selectively use online recruitment, do not take into account individual differences and contexts of potential applicants when they design their recruitment practices. Organisations vary in the practices and processes that they use to achieve their organisational goals; and, disability inequalities are produced both informally

and informally as these work processes are carried out. One of these practices is the process of recruitment, in which practices are designed based on the taken for granted norm of the ideal worker to find the most suitable person for the positions. These ableist norms might be hard to challenge. However, employers that work with or for disabled people have demonstrated that organisations have been able to challenge discriminatory recruitment practices that produce disability inequality. They have willingly adopted proactive measures and the anticipatory duty to provide reasonable adjustments, to design their recruitment processes as a relational approach that focuses on building open relations between jobseekers and employer. This suggests that when the duty is made anticipatory within the equality law by the UK government, it might pressure that all employers adopt more proactive measures to challenge that the process recruitment produces disability inequality.

### **Implications for further research**

There are a number of implications for future research based on the outcomes of this thesis. Findings demonstrate that just like gender, race or class inequality, disability inequality exists within practices, processes and mind-sets embedded within UK organisations, which can lead to inequality regimes. Contributing to this literature, this study acknowledges that individuals with impairments are generally not viewed as the ideal worker when jobs are designed around able-bodied norms (Acker, 1990; Foster and Wass, 2013). One of the key arguments that emerge from this study is that when measures within the job analysis are ableist and based on the concept of the ideal worker, organisations may deny that other individuals have the ability to do the given job. Thus, this thesis contributes to Foster and Wass's (2013) research, in that the concept of the disembodied worker that rejects women's bodies as ideal workers can also be used to explain the experiences of employees with impairments and the devaluing of their skills and abilities in comparison to ableist norms. Thus, the ideal worker is also perceived to be able-bodied and productive. This perspective disables individuals from accessing and securing employment, because it devalues their abilities over others. In fact, this study has contributed to the literature around reasonable adjustments and has demonstrated that when disabled jobseekers were asking for reasonable adjustments, to make the online recruitment process more accessible, application of it by employers was weak or sometimes not available. Moreover, the study has contributed to the recruitment literature that views the recruitment process from a societal perspective (Searle, 2009; Byron et al. 2013). This has helped to show that ableist norms have influenced the design of recruitment practices, the unequal power relationship established between the

jobseeker and the recruiting organisation during the process, and the reason why these practices were disabling for individuals with impairments. Thus, this study has contributed to the recruitment literature by showing that both structural and psycho-emotional disability that can impact on disabled jobseekers, when they engage with the online recruitment process and their job searches and applications online.

The aim of further studies is to recognise these taken-for-granted ableist norms embedded within the job design and analysis and apparently neutral practices adopted in the recruitment process and to further investigate how a broader definition of work that incorporates individual differences and needs might be able to challenge that organisation processes, such as recruitment, reflect this implicit view that only ideal (non-disabled) workers can undertake the designed jobs.

The current context offers scholars the opportunity to investigate the reactions of jobseekers and their experiences of online recruitment processes in a time where the use of these recruitment and selection practices are still growing and evolving. This research explored the experiences of disabled jobseekers with online recruitment practices as a social process, because these have not been accounted for within the literature. When recruitment is viewed as a social process, rather than as a technocratic process, research can explore the social interaction between both parties, the jobseeker and the recruiting organisation and in what way ableist norms of the ideal worker have influenced the design of online recruitment practices. Moreover, it acknowledges the relevance of the perspectives that jobseekers bring to the recruitment process, not only their perspectives within the recruitment process.

Thus, the second key argument to emerge from this thesis is that employers are unaware of social barriers that impact on jobseekers' experiences with online recruitment processes, in particular the growing digital divide within our society. As the study highlights disabled people are one group (among others) who are more likely to not be able to access and afford ICTs and are therefore hindered in participating in everyday social and economic life that has moved online. Likewise, it can be said that this digital divide also intersects with other forms of inequalities such as age. The findings show that for some jobseekers, experiences of social barriers to recruitment was not only in relation to their impairment, but also because of their age, which had an impact on their lack of IT skills. This suggests that future research on investigating jobseekers' responses to online recruitment practices could adopt an intersectional lens to further explore how the intersectional nature of an individual's characteristic can impact on their access to jobs online. Thus, the opportunities for



investigating online recruitment practices and reactions to it extend far beyond disabled jobseekers selected for this study and suggests that future research should consider the impact of these recruitment processes also on other groups, such as older jobseekers, within the UK labour market and to widen the research to focuses on a European level.

Given that disabled people are more likely to be unemployed compared to non-disabled people in the UK labour market, it is important to highlight that social barriers can be experienced externally in form of imposed restrictions of activity, as currently recognised by social modelists (e.g. Oliver, 1990), but there are also social barriers, which erect ‘restrictions’ within disabled people, and therefore limit their psycho-emotional wellbeing. The research shows that social relations with past employers or co-workers, but also structural barriers of the online recruitment process can impact on individuals’ job seeking behaviour and lead to direct and indirect psycho-emotional disablism. Thus, even before jobseekers access the online application form they have been through a process that has placed them in a different group to that of the prospective employer or potential co-worker. Using the extended social relational model of disability has offered a different insight into the ways that individuals with impairments experienced disability in the labour market and in organisations, but also how they engage with recruitment processes and practices, during job searches and applications.

Adopting positive action schemes that offer an automatic interview, such as the Two Tick, or prevent employers to ask about a person’s health, achieve only minor changes to address these issues. Further, financial schemes such as Access to Work, that support organisations with the adoption of reasonable adjustments within the workplace were perceived to be underused, not able to support disabled people in accordance with their impairment, or the unmanageable implementation process may discourage employers to recruit disabled workers in the first instance. It is important to note that this scheme is only available for disabled individuals who have secured employment, and not for disabled jobseekers. There is no financial scheme available for disabled jobseekers in the labour market to request any equipment or support during their job searches online other than the public services of the library or the Jobcentre, which have not been accessible for most jobseekers in this study.

Moreover, it seems that some employers assume that public services of the library or the Jobcentre can provide valuable resources for disabled jobseekers during their job searches and are unaware that these experiences are restricting and inadequate. This thesis suggests that using the extended social model disability as conceptual tool can also be used within

research to represent other groups within society and their experiences of searching and applying for a job in the labour market. It can offer an understanding in what way emotional backgrounds that jobseekers bring to the recruitment process, in form of past experiences with employers or colleagues, but also structural barriers during their job search, can hinder jobseekers from applying or submitting their job application online. The objective is for future research to adopt this social relational understanding of disability and the concept of ableism further and to communicate to employers that there are social barriers that hinder disabled people (and other groups) from participating within the labour market, that have nothing to do with an individual impairment or characteristic, but the way that work and processes have been organised.

The third key argument that emerged from this study is that employers should consider keeping the ‘personal touch’ in recruitment and to view recruitment as a relational process that involves communicating with all jobseekers throughout the whole process and removal of desirable criteria on the job description, see Chapter 7. By adopting this relational and open recruitment process, employers acknowledge that engagement with recruitment processes can vary for each individual and their individual context, and the contact between jobseeker and employer can ensure that any barriers, such as accessibility, to application are removed. This raises questions for further research on this relational and open process of recruitment on whether this approach can make the online recruitment process more inclusive.

The last key argument that developed from the findings of this study is that in order to challenge disability inequality embedded in recruitment practices, legal compliance and human rights efforts from outside the organisation by the UK government are vital. Adopting a new definition of disability in line with article 1 of the CRPD might be able to prompt a rethinking of the substance of the legal framework and to challenge the reactive assumptions that underpin the law. Thus, this definition can highlight the social dimensions of exclusion and disadvantage within society and the workplace. As proposed by Solanke (2017), adopting the social model of disability as a norm in the legal framework of the whole equality legislation might not only protect disabled people from socio-relational barriers, but also other groups. Instead of starting with individual attributes it takes a step behind to address the interlocked systems of oppression that could be of intersectional nature. This supports Campbell’s (2009) intersectional analysis, see Chapter 2, that highlights that ethnicity, gender or sexuality intersect around the difficulties of disability as a result of efforts to maintain ‘ableist normativity’. Thus, disabled people share the ‘Other space’ with that of

women, queer people, people of colour, to that of the dominant, presumably ableist, heteronormative, white, adult (Goodley, 2014). This study has shown that for some jobseekers, age intersects with disability, which has led to experiences of exclusion from this online world of job seeking. This means that individuals are not just excluded from the online recruitment process because they have not learnt to use ICTs when they were young, but they also face barriers to access the Internet and jobs online due to the inaccessible design of the online recruitment process. The findings of this thesis have contributed to an intersectional understanding of inequalities, and similar to Crenshaw's study on black women, it has highlighted how individuals' intersection of social identities, here age and disability, can lead to multiple forms of discrimination. As it stands the Equality Act 2010 does not yet protect individuals from discrimination on grounds of more than one characteristic, however by acknowledging an anti-stigma principle the law could move from a 'quasi-biological' to a 'socio-relational' basis. Further research on discrimination and social barriers within the employment context should take these views into account in order to reveal the visibility of inequalities ingrained in the design of employers' recruitment practices.

### **Concluding remarks**

This thesis has been conducted in order to highlight how disabled people face social barriers during their job searches because of ableist recruitment practices. From the beginning of this research, I have shown commitment to equality by adopting an emancipatory approach to disability research, which has shaped the research design, methodology and research methods adopted. The main aim of this study has been to understand engagement with online recruitment practices from the standpoint of disabled jobseekers and to challenge the way that the recruitment process is designed, but also to engage in a debate with employers to provide empirical evidence that taken for granted ableist norms about the ideal worker are a real barrier for many and mostly ignored. Thus, the online recruitment process has been viewed as a social process, where relationships between the jobseeker, the recruiting organisation and other actors within the labour market, such as the state, are established. The key argument that this research wanted to convey is that disability should not be seen as an individual barrier to employment, but can be the result of the impairment 'in interaction' with social barriers embedded in society and the workplace. Although recruitment practices will always be a way to distinguish between candidates' abilities of whether they are able to do the job, disability, as selection criteria, should not be used in any selection decision. While the study has demonstrated that some employers appear to try to design their recruitment

processes around egalitarian values and beliefs, this research has suggested that a legislative compliance approach of the UK government is vital to challenge inequality regimes that view disabled people as less able, less productive and not as ideal workers.

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## Appendix A

### Consent Form Semi-structured interviews - Easy read

Duration:  1 Hour

**Full title of Project:** Disability Discrimination and the Recruitment Process

**PhD Researcher:** Frederike Scholz

Please tick the box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions



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



I agree to take part in the above study.



I agree to the interview consultation being audio recorded



I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publication



Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

## Consent Form - Semi-structured interviews

**Duration:** Up to 1 hour

Full title of Project:

Disability Discrimination and the Recruitment Process: responding to legal and technological developments

**PhD Researcher:** Frederike Scholz, University of Leeds

Please tick the box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity To ask questions

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

I agree to take part in the above study.

I agree to the interview consultation being audio recorded

I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publication

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

## Appendix B

### Information booklet – Easy read

Before you decide if you want to take part it is important that you understand why I am doing this project.

It is important that you understand what you will be involved in if you take part.



Please read this booklet carefully. You can also talk to other people about it if you would like to.

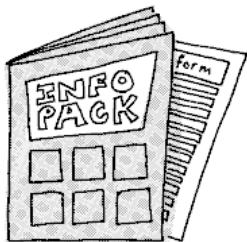


Please ask someone if you do not understand everything. Please inform me if you have further questions.

After you have finished reading, you can decide if you want to take part in this project or not.

Thank you for thinking about taking part in this project!

What is in this booklet?



These are the questions that are answered in this information booklet. You can find them by using the page numbers on each page.





What will happen to me if I take part?



You can talk with me about your experience. This can take up to 1 hour.

What do you want to ask me?



I will ask you about your experiences of applying for a job and if you have faced any barriers. I would like know what you think about applying for a job on the internet and if you think it could be made easier.



You are able to review everything you have said before this will be published.

Will I be recorded?



I will bring a digital voice recorder to record our interview meeting. Recording our meeting will help me remember what you have said.

I will only use the recording to help me write up what we have talked about. No one else will be able to listen to it.

I will keep the recording safely stored on a computer at the university. A password is needed to access it. It will be deleted at the end of my project.

Will taking part be good or bad for me?

Taking part will take up some of your time and I am not able to pay you anything for it. I will tell other people and organisations what I have found out, which will hopefully make them aware of the barriers disabled people face and get them more involved.

Will you tell people what I say?



If you choose to take part in the group discussion, everyone in the group will be able to hear what others are sharing. This means that everyone will have to agree to keep the discussion private.

If you choose to take part in an interview, only I will know what you have said and this will be confidential.

When I write up what you have said, I will not use your real name or anything personal about you.

### **What will you do with what you find out?**

I will do three things with what I find out.



I will write a report for the university and they will look at this and give me a grade for my work

If you wish I will write an easy read summary and send it to you. You are also able to see the full report if you want to.

I will try and let other people who might be interested about my research know what I have found out.

### **Contact information**

Frederike Scholz



07775174255



Leeds University Business School

Innovation Centre, 103

Clarendon Rd, Room F20, Leeds LS2 9DF

Bn10fs@leeds.ac.uk

Thank you for thinking about taking part in my project!

## Information about the research project: Disability Discrimination and the Recruitment and Selection process

This project is about disabled people and online recruitment and selection.

Would you like to take part in this project?

What this project about?

I want to find out what disabled people think about applying for jobs on the Internet.



World Wide Web

I am doing this project because I am a **research** student at Leeds University Business School. **Research** means that I want to find out about things and why they are happening.



I want to find out if disabled people are being left out when it comes to applying for jobs on the Internet. I think disabled people have an equal right to have a job and find work.

I hope that this project will show that disabled people need more access to work and that they should be included.

Interviews will be held and topics discussed.



If you want to take part please get in contact.

**Contact:** Frederike Scholz



07775174255



Bn10fs@leeds.ac.uk

## **Appendix C**

Information about this PhD research project

### **INCLUSIVE ONLINE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION: RESPONDING TO LEGAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS**

This research will investigate online recruitment and selection procedures and how these have changed in the last years. Nowadays, companies use online application tools; however, these might not be accessible for everyone, which can be seen as indirect discrimination and is against the law.

You are invited to take part in this research project, which focuses on inclusive recruitment and selection practices. Before you decide to take part in this research, it is important that you have an understanding of the study, why it is being undertaken and what it will involve.

Please take a few minutes to carefully read the information provided and if you have any questions, or want to have more information about the research project, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the researcher. Contact details can be found below.

### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS PHD PROJECT?**

The overall aim of this thesis is to investigate the evolving online recruitment and selection practices in terms of accessibility, with the help and support of disabled people and employers. The implementation of online recruitment practices has been growing over the years and nowadays the Internet is a medium widely adopted by both job seekers and recruiters within the UK and across the world (Perry and Tyson, 2008). Nonetheless, research regarding the implementation of online recruitment has been limited (Perry and Wilson, 2009).

The findings of this project should assist employers in making their human resource (HR) practices (such as recruitment, job adverts e.g.) more inclusive, not only for disabled people but also for other social groups. Most importantly, the research should help bridge the gap in the literature of disabled job applicants' views on information and communication technologies (ICT) (see, for instance, Vincente and Lopez, 2010; Bruyere, 2008). Technology has not been built by developers with disabled people in mind and, therefore, disabled individuals need assistive technologies to use it. Thus, the impact that technology has, in particular, on disabled people is not always considered by employers.

This project wants to consult with organisations that are at different stages of implementing, or have already implemented, accessible online recruitment and assessment tools. There is the opportunity to create case studies and role models for other employers that want to adopt more accessible and inclusive HR practices. It is of high importance to this research that the experience and insight from an employer's perspective is included. These views can be mapped onto research with disabled jobseekers that is taking part simultaneously.

General research questions:

What is the experience of disabled people when they use the Internet?

What are disabled people's experiences when they apply for a job?

How do these relate to the experiences in terms of online recruitment and selection practices?

Why should employers consider disability in the design of online recruitment and selection practices?

How can employers make sure that their online recruitment and selection practices are inclusive?

The part of the project that you will be involved in focuses on answering the last research questions. Interview questions will be around your recruitment and selection practices, especially online recruitment and selection and how these are inclusive, or will be made inclusive etc.

### **WHY HAVE I BEEN CHOSEN?**

The reason why you and your organisation have been chosen for this research is because your experiences and opinions about the online recruitment and selection are of high importance. It is vital to get your opinions about these new recruitment and selection tools in order to be able to change and adopt them and to give disabled people a fair chance in applying for a job online.

### **Employers, stakeholder and recruitment agencies:**

As an employer, you have been aware of the changing nature of online recruitment and selection procedures. During the process of becoming more accessible, your opinions and experiences are relevant in helping and enabling other employers become accessible.

All the information that you are willing to share will have an impact on online recruitment and selection procedures in the future and, hopefully, the negative and discriminatory barriers people face can be removed.

### **DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART?**

Participation in this research is voluntary, hence it is up to you to decide if you want to take part in it, or not. If you decide to participate in this research, you will be handed this information sheet to keep and will also be asked to sign a consent form. By signing this form, you can still withdraw from the research at any time without any consequences and you do not have to give a reason for doing so.

### **WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO TO TAKE PART?**

The interviews will last no longer than one hour. The location of the interview is for you to choose and the research will take part on a day and time that is most convenient for you. There is a possibility of having a phone interview and the researcher will call you on the number that you provide beforehand.

Interviews are one to one interviews, only you, as a participant, and the researcher will be involved. Questions will be sent out in advance and will be semi-structured to get a discussion started and to guide the interview.

The researcher would welcome open and honest responses to all questions. However, if there are aspects of your organisation, or practices that you do not wish to discuss, the researcher will completely understand this decision.

### **WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE DISADVANTAGES AND RISKS OF TAKING PART?**

There are no risks, or disadvantages involved in taking part in the research. You, as a participant, will have the right and option to stay anonymous, if desired and this will not be questioned. Data will be stored in a secure manner, with regards to the obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998, and all information and raw data will be in an anonymised format.

### **WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?**

This research aims to improve society's views on disabled people and the overall online experience and recruitment procedures of companies. Sharing your experiences and opinions will help in opening people's eyes on the view that we need to adopt more inclusive and accessible HR management practices in order to give everyone a fair chance.

**WILL MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS PROJECT BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL? WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT?**

Participants will need to give permission to allow restricted access to information collected about them in the course of the project. The information shared will be kept strictly confidential and stored on a safe database at Leeds University Business School. You will not be able to be identified in any reports, or publications. The results of the research will most likely be published after the researcher's graduation and there will be possibilities to see parts of the research that you are involved in. The data collected during the course of the project might be used for additional, or subsequent, research (see participant consent form) with former rights and anonymity preserved.

**WHO IS ORGANISING/ FUNDING THE RESEARCH?**

The research will be organised by the researcher with the help of the Clear Company.

**WILL I BE RECORDED, AND HOW WILL THE RECORDED MEDIA BE USED?**

The audio of your activities made during interviews will be used only for analysis and for illustration (e.g. anonymous quotes) in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

**THANK YOU FOR TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH!**

Thank you for taking the time and effort to read through the information provided. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to get in contact via email, or by phone. Participants will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed participant's consent form to keep.

**TIMESCALE OF RESEARCH**

Interviews will be held in person, or over the phone at your earliest convenience. The duration of the interview will be no more than one hour.

**DATES CAN BE CHOSEN BETWEEN:**

13th October – 16<sup>th</sup> of December 2014

(If these dates are not convenient for you, but you would like to participate, the researcher could interview you in January 2015).

### **Contact information**

Frederike Scholz (Postgraduate Researcher)

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## **Appendix D**

### **Question guide for interviews with disabled jobseekers**

Introduction to the research: (First few minutes will not be recorded)

Explanation of the goal of this research

Handing out of consent form and information sheet that underlines the fact that everything said is anonymous and confidential

Personal introduction of both the researcher and participant

### **Employment**

Can you tell me a bit more about your previous work experience?

Do you want to apply for a similar position (Job/volunteering)?

In which job do you see yourself working in the future?

What do you think are the barriers to employment?

### **Applying for a job**

What is your experience when you apply for a job?

Do you think you received sufficient support to apply for jobs?

For instance, do you feel to have adequate skills to apply for jobs on the Internet?

If yes, how have you been supported?

If not, would you like to receive, for instance, IT support or other training courses in the near future?

When you applied for a job where you ask whether you had a disability?

Are you aware of the Equality Act and that employers should not directly ask this question?

### **Internet**

How is your experience with using the Internet?

Do you need any assistive technology that helps you with using the Computer/Internet?

### **Online recruitment and selection**

What are your experiences with online recruitment?

For instance, online application forms, employers' homepages?

Where do you think are the main barriers with using the Internet to apply for jobs?

If there are any, how do you think employers can change it?

Do you have any suggestions for them?

**Additional information**

Do you want to add anything that you think is important to mention?

## **Appendix E**

### **Questions for semi-structured interviews with employer**

Introduction: the first few minutes will not be recorded.

#### **Company profile**

What does your company do?

How many employees do you have in your company? How many of these are disabled?

#### **Job profile**

Could you tell me more about your current job role? Does your role relate to recruitment and selection practices?

How does the role fit into your career history? Is it a new role or an extension of previous expertise?

What are your experiences working with disabled employees? (Either in current or in previous position?)

Have you undertaken any training courses relating to disability? (What type and length of course, and if course was accredited or part of CPD?)

#### **Barriers to work for disabled people**

What do you think are the main barriers for disabled people in obtaining a job?

How do you think could employers overcome these barriers?

#### **Disability**

There are lots of views about what constitutes disability; do you draw upon a particular definition in your work?

From your experience of working with disabled people would you say that your thinking about disability has changed?

The words disability and impairment are often used interchangeably. Do you make a distinction between them?

#### **HR policies**

Do you have diversity or equality policies set in place? Would it be possible to have a copy?

Does the company providing disability awareness training or equality training for employees? If so, could you tell me more about it?

## **Recruitment**

Could you tell me about your recruitment procedures? For example, where do you advertise your jobs?

In what ways do online tools and techniques feature within your recruitment methods? How long have you used online vs other methods (traditional)?

What are your views on online recruitment?

Do you think that your online recruitment is accessible for disabled people?

Do you have ways to find out whether or not the recruitment tools are accessible? Do you monitor this regularly?

What steps have you taken to address any issues with accessibility that have been identified? Do you use any digital tools?

Is disability incorporated into the design of recruitment practices? If so how?

Do you ask job applicants if they have a disability? If so, for what are the reasons? Probe: could I take a look at your application questions?

## **Selection**

Could you talk me through your selection practices? Which selection tools do you use?

Do you think that your online selection practices are accessible for disabled people?

Do you have any ways to find out whether or not the selection practices are accessible?

Do you monitor this regularly?

What steps have you taken to address any issues with accessibility that have been identified?

-Discussions of recommendations by disabled job seekers-

## **Inclusive Recruitment and Selection**

What are your views on inclusive recruitment and selection? What does this mean?

What was the reason for making your HR practices more accessible?

Has it been a difficult task to make your HR practices more accessible? If so, what would you have done differently?

Do you think it has improved your overall working environment or business performance?

### **Reasonable adjustments**

The next set of questions are about 'reasonable adjustments' this is the idea that where disabled people are put at a substantial disadvantage by a provision, criteria or practice of an employers, then the employer should take reasonable steps to avoid that disadvantage.

Can you think of any situations where you had to make the work environment more accessible for an individual? (Disabled or non-disabled?)

If yes, can you tell me how easy or difficult it was to accommodate that change?

Are you aware of Access to Work? (Government grant that can pay for practical support, for instance taxis to work or equipment)

Are you aware of any employees making use of this service?

### **Recommendations**

Do you have any recommendations for other employers who want to make their services more accessible?

### **Future of HR practices**

How do you think online recruitment and selection will change in the future?

## Appendix F

### Recommendations to employers

Improvements	Explanation
Simplified forms	Put it basic, no use of jargon and big words, easy read versions. Too long sentences. Questions: instead of 30-40, just 10 questions. Tick boxes. Pictures that explain questions. Spell check
Disability awareness	Educating society and employers, in order to get a job, employers definitely. People with leaning difficulties and other difficulties they can still do the job Employer did not know what Asperger syndrome was. Again, it is just education for employers; many employers look at a disabled person and think I do not take them on because it is too much trouble. What they don't realise is that so many people that have a disability have been shot down so many times, they would be probably be better taking on someone with a disability because they would cherish that job so much more than somebody that walked in and out of a job.
Talk to people- in person	They should talk to people; They could talk more with people. Is that not what they were supposed to do, it is all computer-based now. It seems like there is no communication going on.
Alternative of advertising	Shop windows, radio stations, pubs, clubs, schools, newspaper.
Software	Speech software – read out questions Zoom text - magnifier Contrast option , to change colours
Alternative options	Send CV direct to employer Working interviews - Some people cannot put down how good they are on paper.
Contact via phone	Clarify things, and get support
Two-tick symbol	Did not work for 2 participants, they never received any feedback -

## Appendix G

### Background of disabled people's organisations

Company D was set up as non-profit organisation in the late nineties as an important alternative and replacement for segregated employment. Inclusive criticises sheltered or 'segregated' employment widely in that this form of employment has not been able to address experiences of disability inequality embedded within the labour market.

They offer a variety of support for disabled people, mostly employment support. Thus, they believe that disabled people should have the same access to employment and equal pay, as non-disabled people.

Company E was founded in the mid eightieth as a non-profit organisation to provide free reading tuition and paid employment for the blind working-class people in the South East of England.

Over the years, the nature and scale of the organisation changed, and they now support people with visual impairments in all aspects of their life.

They are part of the umbrella organisation Vision 2020 and collaborate with other sight loss charities in the UK. Their main aim is to create a society in which disabled people have an equal opportunity to participate.