



‘All parasites should perish’: Online disablist hate speech and a welfare rhetoric on ‘Reddit’

Dissertation submitted for the Degree of Masters in Disability Studies

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Declaration

This work is original and has not been submitted previously in support of any degree or qualification course.

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Abstract

Often unrecognised for its harms, disablist hate speech has become a cultural discourse. Persistently positioned at the centre of a welfare rhetoric and financial inequality, disabled people have become the scapegoat of austerity. Based on this context, this research employs critical discourse analysis in order to delineate how a socialised welfare rhetoric results in the expression of disablist hate speech in the online domain. In order to assess the internet as a facilitator of disablist hate speech, the online bulletin board, Reddit is the chosen site of analysis. Findings highlight both implicit and explicit examples of disablist hate speech, both of which appeal to economic assumptions of disability that are undergird within a welfare rhetoric. It is argued that these assumptions create a metanarrative of disability that is predicated on the characteristics rejected by ableism in times of financial difficulty. This research aims to satisfy a concerning gap in the literature, by uncovering the reality, existence, and production of online disablist hate speech. Additionally, it is hoped such findings will initiate future research, and case for policy reform.

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Introduction

'Disablist hate crime': debates and dustbins

Disablist hate crime is a complex and multidisciplinary issue, carved by the scholarship of sociology, criminology, victimology, and disability studies. Due to its intersectionality, terminological ambiguity impedes the understanding of disablist hate crime at a political, organisational and societal level (See Chakraborti & Garland, 2012; Macdonald, 2015; Perry, 2001; Roulstone & Mason-Bish, 2013; Sherry, 2012; Wickes et al, 2016). With recognition to terminological variety, this research adopts the term 'disablist hate crime' as more conceptually appropriately to the expression of disablism. In line with Roulstone & Mason-Bish (2013), this terminological diversion appeals to the barrier focused approach of the social model of disability to locate disablist hate within the wider constraints of an ableist society. From this perspective, processes of disablement are reconceptualised and repositioned within cultural narratives (Quayson, 2013). Culturally focused then, this research seeks to uncover the presence of disablist hate crime and identify how it is aversively and pervasively mediated on the online domain.

According to Quarmby (2008) the elucidation of hate pertains to the intentional devaluing of the 'Other' so that the superiority of the majority is confirmed. With this in mind, disablist utterances create a cultural story that renders the illusion of ideal citizens through the representation of disabled people as inferior. These stories invoke and endorse the hegemony of ableism, and represent a culturally created metanarrative of disability, creatively and strategically drawn out to confine the 'Other' to a status of ultimate inferiority. A metanarrative is thus formed that reduces disability to the characteristics, traits, and limitations that cultural representations denote. This process is most notably uncovered by Bolt (2012) in his analytic exploration of a metanarrative of blindness in twentieth-century Anglophone writing. These texts, he argues, are culturally scribed 'from the underpinning assumptions of ocularcentrism and ophthalmocentrism, to the normate subject position of the sighted and the resulting perpetuation of ocularnormativism' (Bolt, 2012, p. 15). Placing the assumptions of ableism at the centre, this research similarly seeks to draw out a metanarrative of disability, and unveil the expression of disablist attitudes that it permits. More specifically, it is argued that a

metanarrative of disability is rendered by the disavowals of ableism. In this process, disabled people become subjects of disposal, and a dustbin for all that ableism rejects. 7

Drawing upon Hevey's 'dustbins for disavowal' (1991, p. 34), this research exposes how disablist hate speech is keyed to a metanarrative of disability, drawn out by rejected traits, characteristics, and bodies. Like Shakespeare (1997, p. 222), this research develops Hevey's 'dustbins for disavowal' in order to deconstruct representations in which 'disabled people are objects, on to which artists project particular emotions'. For Shakespeare (1997), disabled people represent the difficult aspects of human existence, and are therefore, continually scapegoated as an object of cultural fear. Working in line with both Hevey (1991) and Shakespeare (1997) then, this research seeks to unveil how disablist hate speech is sculpted by a metanarrative of disability as a dustbin for disavowal. By focusing on a climate consumed by the emotions, frustrations, and tensions of austerity, this research explores how disability becomes a site to which the rejected characteristics of ableism may be disposed. Disability, it is contended, becomes the dustbin for the disavowals of neoliberalism, elucidated by a metanarrative that is disablist and hateful.

By bringing together a theoretical framework that draws together Hevey's (1991) 'dustbins for disavowal' and Bolt's (2012) 'metanarrative of disability', this research addresses the socialisation of disablist hate crime. Indeed, disablist hate crime is often ignored in political and academic debates, due to the cultural misconception that it doesn't exist. This climate of ambiguity becomes murkier still due to the somewhat exhausting debates surrounding the very terminology of 'hate'. For Chakraborti & Garland (2012, p. 500) the terminology of hate 'is a slippery and somewhat elusive notion' that is misleading to the crime that it serves to prosecute (Quarmby, 2008; Wickes et al, 2016). On the contrary, Mason-Bish (2013, p. 21) claims that 'hate crime offers a chance to reflect on the underlying societal and structural discrimination that led to them [disabled people] being targeted'. This research, like Mason-Bish, defends the relevance of 'hate' to the everyday disablism that shadows the lives of many disabled people. Hate is a strong emotion that is culturally constructed, as well as being conceptually complex. Yet this seems fitting for a culture that constructs bodily difference as undesirable based upon the ideals, demands, and expectations of society, all of which are also a cultural construct. 'Hate' is, therefore, highly applicable to the disablist acts and expressions that are aimed at disabled people due to their deviation from a cultural construction of 'normalcy'. Indeed, the conceptual framing and practical expression of hate may be culturally constructed, yet for many

disabled people this construction is a very real, and demeaning reality. Therefore, to reduce disablism to anything less than hate is to ignore the harms that it imposes.

Research Aims:

- This research aims to identify instances of disablist hate speech on the online bulletin board, Reddit.
- By employing critical discourse analysis (CDA), this research aims to contextualise disablist hate speech in relation to a welfare rhetoric in order to confront the socialisation of hate against disabled people.
- This research positions disablist hate in a culture subscribed to ableism by drawing out a metanarrative of disability based upon Hevey's 'dustbins for disavowal'.
- Based upon research findings, this dissertation makes a case for future research that can further expose disablist hate speech, and in turn, pave the way for policy reform.

Literature Review

A welfare Rhetoric and the new 'folk devil'

Recent commitments to reduce welfare expenditure are ideologically polluted by a Conservative rhetoric of neoliberal citizenship. Continuously keyed to this discourse, employability has become the single most important condition of the body (Lakes, 2011). In turn, we have witnessed increasing hostility for bodies that do not conform. Indeed, inappropriate public and political discourse has replaced 'notions of welfare with workfare' (Harris, Owen & Gould, 2012) and resulted in a barrage of verbal abuse. According to Briant, Watson & Philo (2013), this rhetoric navigates the emotions of austerity to construct disabled people as the new 'folk devil'. Negotiating traditionally kept social divisions (Brink, 2001), a welfare rhetoric indulges a narrative whereby 'the neoliberal, hard-working taxpayer' is the victim of financial inequality (Hughes, 2015). A story of financial inequality is detrimental, justifying a war between 'us', the neoliberal hardworking taxpayer, and 'them', the 'Other', disabled people (Garthwaite, 2011; Quarmby, 2011; Wiggan, 2012). As a result, a cultural discourse has emerged that brands disabled people as 'scum', 'feckless', and 'workshy' (Garthwaite, 2011), invigorated by the vitriolic media rhetoric of 'scrounger', 'cheat', and 'skiver' that is increasingly dominant in Conservative-backed tabloid articles (Briant, Watson & Philo, 2011). For Phipps (2014, p. 16), this dichotomy is magnified as 'neoliberal and neoconservative mentalities and powerful groups and institutions have been able to construct knowledge about social and cultural Others' by drawing upon historically-cultivated myths about disabled people (Kitchin, 1998).

This discourse, it will be argued, is aversively hateful and exceedingly harmful. Fortified within the twists and turns of neoliberal ideology, disablist hate speech exemplifies Derrida's logocentricism as it 'constructs, reifies, and often conceals alternative realities through subtle but pervasive workings of power' (Danforth & Rhodes, 1997, p. 358). In this way, disablist hate speech embodies the rhetorical fixtures of neoliberalism to present disability as a financial drain on society (Yeo & Moore, 2003) and a personal burden to 'hardworking taxpayers' (Novis, 2013). Scapegoated by the political blurring of austerity, disability becomes the dustbin for the disavowals of neoliberalism, reduced to an object in need of disposal, and subject to discursive attack.

Shown by Briant, Watson & Philo (2011) a welfare rhetoric is readily socialised by a culture burdened by financial instability. Similarly noted by Wiggan (2012), a hostile environment is rapidly being created for those who receive support from a system of social security. Driven by a culture of resentment, blame, and hostility (Baumberg et al, 2012; Hughes, 2015) the principle of solidarity is diminished and social cohesion is destroyed (Ellis, 2016). As this analysis will explore further, a climate of austerity is central to the creation of a culture that condones disablist hate speech, based upon false accusations of fraudulence (Briant, Watson & Philo, 2013; Hughes, 2015).

Disablist hate speech: a cultural story

Theoretically grounded in the struggles of racial inequality, hate speech has emerged through a vacuum of ethno-phaulisms, intending to demonise ethnic minorities (Mullen & Leader, 2005), and has only recently entered the political and academic spheres of wider disciplines. The discursive characteristics of hate speech, whichever discipline studied within, are dangerous. Concretalised by cultural discourses, hate speech creates a cultural tolerance to discrimination (Nemes, 2002), a process best understood by Allport's (1954) scale of prejudice. This scale defines a linear progression from the expression of antilocution (speech) through to extermination. From this perspective, hate speech provides an edifice of prejudices that allow for a ready climate of violence (Iganski & Levin, 2015). However, as Fairclough (1992) tells us, language is both socially constituted and socially constitutive, expressed through and within social encounters. Hence, hate speech does not end as another act of prejudice begins. Rather, hate speech mediates and is mediated by an unaccepting culture, forcing its harms within and beyond the initial victim. For this dissertation then, Iganski's (2008) 'waves of harms' approach provides a more appropriate and holistic consideration of the truly dangerous impact that hate speech permeates, moving in and between the personal, social and cultural. Located in the personal, hate speech ensues a hurtful reminder of the unequal social hierarchies embedded within society (Maussen & Grillo, 2014; Tsesis, 2002) to ignite the effects of psycho-emotional disablism. That is, the internalization of disablism can damage one's sense of self, confidence and ontological security (Thomas, 2007; Becker, Byson & Jipson, 2000). Extending beyond the individual to social and cultural spaces, hate speech pervades the 'locational imprisonment' of marginalized groups (Iganski, 2006); echoing the threatening and hateful message that anyone perceived as 'Other' is also a target for abuse. Also recognised by

Perry (2003, p. 19), hate speech threatens certain communities through their enactment of ‘message crimes’. This sense of community threat has recently been acknowledged by the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (2016) who, in their latest hate crime report, confirm the negative impact that hate speech has on the societal climate, a threat particularly emphasised by political narratives of ‘us’ and ‘them’. 34

While the study of disablist hate speech is a relatively novel research area, disablist slurs, insults, and labels are inextricably bound to a history of disability oppression. Historically, language-use has been key to maintaining unequal power relations between disabled and non-disabled people (Chakraborti & Garland, 2012; Perry, 2001). For example, labels such as ‘mongolian people’ (Down, 1866), ‘lame’ (Little et al, 1969), ‘cripple’ (Reiser, 2001), and ‘feeble-minded’ (Goddard, 1912) have all sought to scientifically validate a binary construct of the population. This terminology, according to Stiker (1999), is innately and explicitly negative and has contributed to the historical Othering of disability. Left unmanaged, a rhetoric of categorisation appeals to a metanarrative of disability that supports ableism. For example, research conducted by ABA (n.d) suggests that almost 70% of teachers have heard children using the words ‘spaz’, ‘spastic’, ‘retard’, or ‘mong’ in the school environment, while 44% of adults also admit to using such terminology themselves when in casual conversation with others. These findings suggest that hurtful and disablist discourses have been socialised, justified by adults as ‘banter’ (ABA, n.d.). It is, therefore, time to recognise:

‘the nasty labels associated with people with disabilities are just as hurtful as their racial and religious counterparts, but are simply not recognised to the same extent... The same people who would never dream of using the N-word are hardly reluctant to refer to an intellectually challenged individual as a “retard” or to a person in a wheelchair as a “cripple” or “freak” (Levin, 2013, p. 99).

In line with Levin (2013) then, this dissertation contends that a culture of ‘banter’ has unapologetically made use of disablist attitudes to result in the normalisation of disablist hate speech. Like Parekh (2006, p. 214), it is thought that hate speech may be ‘subtle, moderate, non-emotive and even blanc... conveyed through ambiguous jokes, innuendoes and images’ and therefore persistently overlooked. A recent study conducted by Bolt (2016) exemplifies these moments of aversive disablism, using critical discourse analysis to expose the indirect moments of disablist language used recurrently in the sitcom ‘Peep Show’. For Bolt (2016, p.

754), disablist humour ‘functions in the culture of bullying that defines social boundaries between non-disabled people and disabled people with preference accorded to the former’. On this note, continuous overlooks are both an unlawful and ignorant expression of hate themselves, and add to the cultural avoidance of disability (Bolt, 2012).

The blurring of disablist hate speech as an accepted cultural discourse is democratically damaging, and ideologically conflicted. Entering the murky waters of an ideological clash, unstable boundaries between ‘hate speech’ and ‘free speech’ continue to create extensive ethical debates (See: Bleich, 2011; Boyle, 1992; Brennan, 2009; Ghanea, 2013; Maussen & Grillo, 2014; Taylor, 2012; Thompson, 2012). For Utilitarian, John Stuart Mill, free speech is considered to be an essential commodity of the maturation of society (Mill, 1859). Any repression of free speech is therefore criticised as an intentional obstruction to social progress (Slagle, 2009) as well as an unlawful prohibition of personal opinion (Bruce, 2001). For others, the philosophy of free speech sculpts a slippery slope towards illusionary democracy and a false sense of equality (Cornwell & Orbe, 1999; Nemes, 2002; Slagle, 2009). Indeed, when hate speech is cloaked by the protection of free speech, it allows for the demeaning, denigrating and silencing of certain groups of people (Slagle, 2009) in favour of the narratives of those in power. In this way, free speech is a political prize (Fish, 1994) that mystifies and cloaks the discriminative values of powerful members of society. Free speech then, may hijack any attempt to prohibit hate speech, and is a particular concern for the issue of prosecution. This has recently been the case, particularly for the offence ‘stirring up hatred’ whereby the ‘need to consider an individual’s right to freedom of expression’ (CPS, 2016, p. 35) continually prevents the successful prosecution of this offence. Unfortunately, appeals to free speech are given a home on the online domain, whereby the ‘free space’ of the internet (Adams & Roscigno, 2005) provides a venue for freedom of expression.

The World Wide Web: a revolutionary risk.

The growth of the World Wide Web has revolutionised the western world. As the offer of immediate, global and anonymous interaction has transformed the way in which we gather and distribute information (Banks, 2010; Bowker & Tuffin, 2002; Buchstein, 1997; Fenton, 2012; Rheingold, 2000; Yates, 2001), the internet has become a site of information exchange and creator of cultural pedagogy (Reid, 2003 cited in Hodkinson, 2014). Geographically boundless, the internet provides a platform for multicultural knowledge construction and the dissemination

of values and ideas across the globe (Daniels, 2008; Littleton & Kakkinen, 1999 cited in Thomas, 2002). According to Williamson et al (2001) and Geo, Bricout & Huang (2005), these facilities allow vibrant disability communities to discuss disability issues in a supportive environment (Stamou, Alevriadou & Soufla, 2016). Similarly, research conducted by Huffaker & Calvert (2001) found that, particularly for young people, the internet provides a space for users to build their own identity, rather than one that the physical world imposes onto them. These findings are supported by Bowker & Tuffin (2002; 2004; 2007), who suggest that internet users are able to exist outside of the conventions and confinements of offline reality. Thus, in the online domain, ‘the power of the gaze becomes displaced by a textually oriented medium, which affords disabled people agency over important aspects of identity construction’ (Bowker & Tuffin, 2002, p. 340).

Like Coliandris (2016) however, this dissertation considers the internet as ‘janus-faced’, offering disabled people both opportunity and threat. For Banks (2010) the internet creates a ‘new frontier’ for spreading hate ‘as millions can be reached through an inexpensive and uncumbered social network’ (p.234). The manipulation of these boundless facilities provide a strengthened infrastructure for the proliferation and reproduction of hate speech (Cornwell & Orbe, 1999; Elbahtimy, 2014). Most notably documented by scholars in the field of race studies (See Adams & Roscigno, 2006; Chau & Xu, 2007; Duffy, 2003; Lee & Leets, 2002), the internet creates a venue for bullying and online hate to take place (Orwick & Settles, cited in Brennan, 2009) without the geographical and indeed, moral constraints of the everyday physical world (Duffy, 2003).

While recent recommendations from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights recognise the recent surge in online hate speech towards ethnic minorities (See FRA, 2016), there is no recognition of online disablism. This ignorance is mirrored by the UK hate crime legislative framework. While section 145 and 146 of *The Criminal Justice Act* (2003) imposes a duty on the criminal justice system to increase sentencing if evidence of hostility towards race, religion, disability, sexual orientation and/or transgender identity is identified, there remains a lack of unity in response to different types of hate crime (Owusu-Bempah, 2015). A recent Law Commission recommendation continues a system of discrepancy, supporting the case that disability should not be included under sections 18-23 and 29B-29F of *The Public Order Act* (1986) which makes it an offence to incite/stir up hatred in relation to race, religion and/or sexual orientation (See Law Commission, 2014, no.348). This recommendation aligns

to previous dismissals of disability, justified by the understanding that any extension or ‘creation of a new offence of stirring up hatred would not necessarily help’ (Maria Eagle, cited in Quarmby, 2008). Unfortunately, the most recent Crown Prosecution Report (2016) provides a similarly disappointing, yet unsurprising, framework offering very little in terms of a new approach to tackling ‘disability hate crime’ as well as no recognition of online disablist hate speech.

Following the landmark publication of *Out in the open, Tackling disability-related harassment: A manifesto for change* (EHRC, 2012), this dissertation uncovers the problem of cyber-hate to urge a governmental response. By placing an unthoughtful political rhetoric at the centre of this analysis, this dissertation seeks to uncover the fabrication of online disablist hate speech. By identifying how damaging stereotypes and derogatory images are broadcast with virtual impunity (Quarmby, 2013), this dissertation hopes to add to a recently birthed field of study. It is intended that these findings will expose the presence of online disablist hate speech that intends to, or is likely to, stir up hatred towards disabled people. By revealing instances of online disablist hate speech, this dissertation hopes to make a case for policy reform that recognises the internet as a space that invokes and socialises disablist hate speech.

Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis

The qualitative design of this research aims to unearth and confront disabling discourses on the internet. Contextually, critically and interpretively employed, this qualitative approach pursues a journey of linguistic meaning-making (Barnes, 1992; O'Donoghue, 2007) and a deconstruction of the political, cultural and economic forces (Lim, 2014) that underpin disablist discourses. Inseparable from their surrounding social world (Souto-Manning, 2014), *discourses* are consumptive, distributive and reproductive processes (Rogers, 2004) that shape, and are shaped by, cultural systems and structures (Fairclough, 2013). This dissertation considers disablist hate speech as an artefact 'of *discourse*', a discursive expression that is 'socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned' (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 6). Furthermore, it is contended that the way in which disablist hate speech is represented, spoken, and written, uncovers underlying regimes of power (Blommaert, 2005; Fairclough, 1992; Liasidou, 2011). That is, disablist hate speech 'as *discourse*' is a social practice, ideologically geared towards the maintenance of unequal power relations (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). With this in mind, this dissertation aims to expose the presence of disablist hate speech as a direct expression of power and subjugation. To do so, critical discourse analysis (CDA) is employed to dismantle the power of disablist hate speech as it moves between its textual and contextual presence (Weir, 2005).

Concerned with the discursive aspect of social problems (Van Dijk, 1996), CDA aims to expose the social wrong of disablement as it is uttered on the online domain. Similarly, for Grue (2015, p. 5), CDA aims to 'uncover the ways in which disability- and disablement- is constructed, administered, and policed through the socially and bureaucratically embedded use of language'. Committed to the exposure of injustice, CDA aims to define, categorize, theorize and explain how social wrongs take shape in their discursive form (Richie & Spencer, 2002) by unearthing the dialectical relationship between discourse, society and culture (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Thus, the problem-oriented nature of CDA will enable this study to tease out the linguistic entrapments of disablist hate speech as it is expressed, shared, and retrieved on the online domain. Moving beyond this, CDA is critically and politically engaged (Jaworski & Coupland, 2006) working to critique discourse in relation to social wrongs. By considering discourse in context, CDA aims to take action towards the removal of such wrongs (Fairclough,

2015). Indeed, for Fairclough (2015), CDA allows the analyst to progress their research through the stages of ‘critique, explanation, and action’. To aid this process, this dissertation develops Fairclough’s ‘dialectical relational’ stages of CDA (See Fairclough, 2013) into a structural tool, ensuring that the conclusion of this dissertation identifies and contextualises disablist hate speech, as well as recommending ways to confront this crime (See Table 1). This systematic approach to consolidating research findings aims to unveil the influences, ideologues and values that are characteristically rejected by non-disabled people and thrown into a metanarrative of disability. This metanarrative permits the presence of online disablist hate speech.

Stage One	Contextualisation	Focus on ‘online disablist hate speech’ in its surrounding context
Stage Two	Identification	Identify the cultural barriers to challenging ‘online disablist hate speech’
Stage Three	Recommendation	Identify the direction for future research and policy reform that will confront ‘online disablist hate speech’

Table 1 | Stages of Consolidation

This table outlines the three stages of consolidation taken for the conclusion of this dissertation. It is my own adaptation of Fairclough’s (2013) dialectical stages of critical discourse analysis.

Stages one and two endorse a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ (Grue, 2015) to guide a conclusion that systematically interrogates disablist hate speech as a culturally defined metanarrative. These stages reject this metanarrative, exposing its intent to objectify disability to a dustbin for the uncertainties of ableism and for the anxieties and fears of neoliberalism. Developing this, stage three moves beyond linguistic scrutiny and towards a process of critical confrontation and recommendation. This will include recommendations and directions for future research and policy reform. Aligning to the social model of disability, this stage aims to address the cultural and social rendering of disablist hate speech as it is mediated in the online domain.

Ethical Consideration

With the intention to expose online disablist hate speech, issues of researcher subjectivity bring to question the empirical validity of this study. For Widdowson (cited in Blommaert, 2005),

CDA represents a process of ideological interpretation, simply cloaked by the phrasing of ‘analysis’ (See also Liasidou, 2016; Mancini, 2011; Mogashoa, 2014). Thus, although the criticality of CDA offers the analytic tools for a deconstructive and comprehensive reading of text, it is important that researchers consider their own positionality within the research process (Fairclough, 2015). Reflexively engaged, researchers should evolve a ‘continuing mode of self-analysis’ (Callaway, 1992 cited in Bourke, 2014) in order to recognize how their own ontological positioning and emancipatory interests guide the research process (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). This dissertation, for example, is directed by my alliance to the field of disability studies. Particularly, I am concerned with how cultural, social and political forces permeate, and indeed, normalise expressions of disablist hate crime. In addition, a recent exploration of ‘poverty porn’ (See Runswick-Cole & Goodley, 2015) across the media sector has fueled my commitment to confronting the derogatory constructions of disability that are mediated by a welfare rhetoric. Indeed, this exploration led me to adopt an intersectional approach that would recognize the production of disablist hate speech within a neoliberal dialogue of economics.

Although committed to social justice, my identification as a non-disabled researcher raises concerns following a history of objectifying and unethical research produced by non-disabled professionals (Barnes & Mercer, 1997; Branfield, 1998; Kitchin, 2000; Moore & Beazley, 1998; Verstraete, 2012). Directed by the interests and profile of researchers, traditional disability research is suggested to have been irrelevant, harmful (Bolt, 2014b; Oliver, 1992) and disempowering (Shakespeare, 2006; Watson, 2012). Challenged by the disabled people’s movement and a rhetoric of ‘nothing about us without us’ (Chorlton, 2000), traditional research methodologies were condemned, and an emancipatory research paradigm emerged as a holistic alternative. Chiming to the importance of reciprocity, empowerment, and partnership (Shakespeare, 2006), an emancipatory approach obligates a process directed by the narratives, perspectives, and realities of disabled people. Emancipatory disability research should be produced ‘by’ and ‘with’ disabled people (Barnes, 2010; Kramer-Roy, 2015; Zarb, 1992).

With this in mind, the text-based approach of this study may be considered as limited for discussing disability issues. This is particularly the case for Barnes (2010) who argues that disability research must work with disabled people in order to locate disablement within its cultural origins. Yet, as Snyder & Mitchell (2006) contend, participatory methods are not always desirable. Rather, the over-exhaustion of these methods results in a process of

subjectification that has long-standing history. Therefore, while a text-based design does not meet all emancipatory requirements, it appeals to the theoretical framework of the social model of disability by inviting a critical and close reading of disabling cultural texts (Bolt, 2012). Like Bolt (2014b, p. 2-3), this dissertation endorses ‘representational methodologies’ as ‘a way of exploring social attitudes toward disabled people without contributing to the ableism and disablism at their very core’. Exhausting the researcher only, text-based approaches alleviate the reliance upon people-based methodologies (Snyder & Mitchell, 2006). Depending on the ontological positioning of the research, text-based methods can also maintain the essence of emancipatory research. For this dissertation, a commitment to influence policy, remove barriers and contribute to improving the lives of disabled people directs this dissertation (Bolt, 2014b).

Methods

As demonstrated in the literature review, the internet has become a message board for cultural pedagogies, ideologies and beliefs. For Williams & Burnap (2016b, p. 215) this creates ‘a dataset that can be subject to criminological inspection’. Any attempt to download and analyze all available content, however, would create a dataset too large for this study (Yates, 2001). Thus, the online bulletin board ‘Reddit’ was the chosen site of analysis in an attempt to narrow the focus of this study. Boasting ‘a pretty open platform and free speech place’ (Reddit, 2015a), users from over 215 different countries (Reddit, 2015b) and over 853,824 Subreddits to date (DMR, 2016), this site attracts cultural, geographical and ideological diversity. Thus, in order to refine and narrow available content, a robust and logical research design directs the selection of relevant posts. Specific terms applicable to the context of the study were used to search for and select, relevant Reddit posts and comments. Based upon previous research (Briant, Watson & Philo, 2011; 2013; Garthwaite, 2011; Quarmby, 2008), the terms ‘disability’, ‘disabled people’, ‘scrounger’, ‘shirker’, ‘welfare’, ‘benefit/benefit claimant’, ‘cheat’, and ‘fraud/fraudulent/fraudster’ were searched for, appealing to their repeated postulation within a climate of austerity across social and news media. In addition, the term ‘retard’ was searched for, to reflect the high number of US subscribers. This term remains prominent in the US culture, only recently removed from state legislation under Rosa’s Law in 2010 (Public Law, 111-256). Although this was swiftly followed by ruling of the Social Security Administration in 2013 replacing the term ‘mental retardation’ with ‘intellectual disability’ in the Federal Register (Federal Register, 2013), US culture is yet to dispose of this derogatory label.

To refine the dataset further, posts were selected initially according to their title. Following this, a reading of the full Reddit post confirmed which posts would be analyzed, selected by a process of descriptive and analytical coding. For Pandit (1996), the coding process is essential in order to maintain the validity of a piece of research as well as enabling the identification of the codes, connections and themes that are intricately hidden within the discourse (Cope, 2010; Khandar, 2009; Moghaddam, 2006). The first stage, descriptive coding, began to pull out emerging themes (See Appendix, 1). The re-reading of the discourse then allowed for the critical *deciphering* and *interpreting* of data (Böhm, 2004). This second stage, analytic coding, refined and developed descriptive codes into a thematically consolidated set of analytic codes (See Appendix, 2). In total, 24 posts and 16,908 comments were descriptively and analytically coded. Based upon the literature explored in this dissertation, analytic codes were brought together to produce a set of four themes. The following analysis centers on these themes, exploring how ‘quality of life’, ‘eugenic logic’, ‘neoliberal citizenship’, and ‘anonymity’, may unravel the complex intersection between disablist hate speech and a socialized welfare rhetoric.

Data Analysis

This analysis draws out instances of disablist hate speech on the online bulletin board, Reddit. Hate speech is first contextualised within a discourse of disability, dependency and death, followed by an exploration of how these contexts, while explicitly hateful, are normalised and blurred by neoliberalism. It is argued that a welfare rhetoric filters into the online domain, socialising a metanarrative of disability as the ultimate ‘dustbin for disavowal’ within a climate of austerity. Finally, the online facility of anonymity is considered within the context of a politically mediated binary construct of ‘us’ against ‘them’.

‘The stuff of nightmares’: tragedy, fear and death

Prevalent in the texts analysed, disability narratives are shaped by cultural fears and grounded in the ideological restraints of ableism. Described as ‘the stuff of nightmares...[and]... a fate worse than death’ (Reddit, 2012a), disability takes on the fear of an existence that is unimaginable to ableism. Indeed, the likening of disability to a nightmare reveals much about how disability presents a troubling and unsettling state of being for non-disabled people. Derived from middle English *nai'tmæd* meaning the presence of a ‘female incubus’ and the ‘feeling of suffocation’ (Onions, 1966), nightmares are vivid elucidations of fear that momentarily lock us into inescapable and chaotic encounters with our deepest, and sometimes unconscious anxieties. The synonymising of disability to a nightmare is thus constructed through the cultural and historical fear of disability, fabricated by the lurid interpretations of ableism that mark bodies as desirable or undesirable, as one or the ‘Other’.

‘Scrupulously described, interpreted, and displayed’, the bodies, minds, and behaviours of disabled people function as ‘icons upon which people charge their anxieties, convictions, and fantasies’ (Garland-Thompson, 1997, p. 56). Tanya Titshkosky (2016) posits that these imaginations are limited in embodied validity, and limiting for disabled people, as they work through the words and assumptions of ableism. This metanarrative of disability aligns to Hevey’s ‘dustbins for disavowal’, which, as Shakespeare contends, justifies ‘disabled people [as] objects, on to which artists project particular emotions, or which are used to represent values or evils’ (Shakespeare, 1997, p. 223). Indeed, embodied narratives of disability are displaced to make way for an ableist imagination. In this process, disabled people are reduced

to dustbins, expected to incontestably take on the rejected characteristics of ableism. Such a process is implicitly hateful, rhetorically manipulating the narratives of disabled people to one that serves a cultural story. That is, the reduction of disability to a nightmare plays to a process of normate reductionism which, as documented by Bolt (2014a), denotes a disabled person as first and foremost, disabled, inferior, and unworthy.

Continually and explicitly articulated, disabled people are assumed to have ‘no life worth living’ (Reddit, 2012a), intricately described by one user as:

‘stricken by the misfortune to live the rest of [their] life as an imbecile trying to fumble [their] way towards the grave’ (Reddit, 2012a)

Imagined through ableism, a metanarrative of disability is created, predicated upon a nightmare of unimaginable horror; a life that is consumed by tragedy, loss and darkness (Hunt, 1966). As one Redditor posits, ‘I wouldn’t want that life, so it is hard to think these guys are truly happy’ (Reddit, 2014a). Such a statement assumes the pitiful and tormented existence of disabled people (Overboe, 2009) due to the quality of life measures held by the normate narrator. Disability, as narrated by Redditors, becomes an anecdote of ableism as disabled people become the ‘dustbins for disavowal’ to a culture fearful of ‘their mortality... the loss of labour power and other elements of narcissism’ (Hevey, 19921, p. 34). Or, as Overboe (2007) defines, burdened by the ‘normative shadows’ that judge bodies against the criteria’s of normalcy clung to by participants of ableism.

In favour of a metanarrative of disability that suits the normate narrator, it is assumed that ‘physical death is better than the social death of disability’ (Swain & French, 2000, p. 572). For one Redditor,

‘there are things worse than death. Rotting away, deprived of your beautiful physical and mental abilities’ (Reddit, 2012a)

Reduced to a ‘lacking body, a body in need, a failing body-as-organism’ (Goodley, 2009, p. 264), a metanarrative consumed by destruction envisages disability as a life of slow death. Speaking an alliance to the medical model of disability, the bodies of disabled people are declared by the online discourse of Reddit to be ‘deformed, maimed, mutilated, broken,

diseased' (Davis, 1995, p. 5). Simultaneously, the lives of disabled people are rendered 'absolutely pointless' (Binding & Hoche, 1920 cited in Burleigh, 1994, p. 17) and represent, for non-disabled people, 'the disavowal of the presence of death and mortality' (Hevey, 1991, p. 13). Indeed, such representations constitute a culturally scribed metanarrative of disability that aligns to the process of normate reductionism. Confined to this process, disabled people are 'objectified [and] framed in a narrative that bolsters the normate subject position' (Bolt, 2014a, p. 9).

A metanarrative of disability as something of a nightmare, is validated by the representation of disabled people as child-like, and therefore, dissimilar to Redditors themselves. Coined 'infantilization' by Leonard in 1984, this very rhetoric is prevalent in references to disabled people as a 'manchild of a son' (Reddit, 2014b), 'a vegetable baby' (Reddit, 2012a), a '1 year old adult' (Reddit, 2014b), and a 'forevertoddler' (Reddit, 2014b). Similarly stating that 'a child with severe disabilities is never raised' (Reddit, 2014a) and that 'these children are a project that will never end' (Reddit, 2014b), disabled people are reductively keyed to the identity, inabilities and expectations of a child. Of further insult, one Redditor describes a disabled person as 'a creature that will never develop' (Reddit, 2012a). Such a discourse not only infantilises, but dehumanises disabled people to the status of a creature, and in other words, an 'it' or a 'thing', rather than a human being. While the rhetorical process of 'infantilization' is already a derogatory attempt to insult someone, and therefore unquestionably hateful, it becomes normalised by a culture of responsabilization, and strict bodily measures. Produced under the politics of 'personal responsibility' (Brown & Baker, 2012), disablist hate speech endorses notions of 'ideal' bodily comportment. Unable to attain to these normative measures, disabled people are assumed as unable to take care of their bodies to acceptable standards, and thus reduced to the immaturities of a child that must be disposed of in adulthood.

For one Redditor, the casting of disabled people as child-like and unable to meet normative expectations is explicitly hateful. Describing a disabled person, the Redditor states that:

'his lack of personal hygiene is literally gag-inducing. He's overweight and has a potbelly that sticks out from underneath his stained T-shirts, and the smell of his BO wafts across the room when he moves quickly or stretches' (Reddit, 2012b)

Appearing in a thread entitled ‘I hate retards’, hostility is made explicit in the title, and magnified by the stereotypical representation of disabled people as overweight and dirty. These assumptions are intrinsically dehumanizing and explicitly hateful, intricately detailing disgust in order to arouse likeminded individuals who condone and indeed, add to this thread of hate. For example, another Redditor replies ‘they make me physically nauseous by their appearance, their behaviour and their fucking stench’ (Reddit, 2012b) whilst yet another writes ‘I will not even breathe in their disgusting direction’ (Reddit, 2012b). These comments are saturated with personal prejudices that explicitly intend to insult disabled people, while simultaneously confirming their more superior status as the normate narrator. The sharing of disablist hate speech in these comments illustrates the urgent need to take political action that extends the offence of stirring up hatred. Indeed, these comments express visceral and venomous emotions as repulsion and enmity are unashamedly articulated (Sherry, 2016). The outcome of this rhetoric is the exclusion of disability within understandings of the human. In addition, the incitement of hate in this derogatory manner magnifies a metanarrative of disability that is formulated upon those unwanted characteristics of ableism. Like the characteristics disabled people are keyed to culturally then, disabled people become something in need of disposal, a nightmare that ableism must overcome.

‘Letting the autistic and physically disabled people carry on their bad genetics is just a huge flaw’: disability, contamination and eugenics

Coated under the guise of so-called ‘merciful killing’, the online discourses analysed were found to demonstrate strong support for modern practices of eradication, such as genetic intervention and euthanasia. In one Redditor’s opinion, a ‘swift and painless’ death (Reddit, 2012a) is more humane than a ‘brief, horrible life... unable to communicate, reduced and prideless’ (Reddit, 2012a). Within this narrative, lines are blurred, ethical boundaries are pushed, and decisions are made in accordance to measures, assumptions and judgements imagined through ableism. Whilst these examples are not explicitly hateful in the form of everyday disablist insults, their logic re-awakens eugenic justification for the eradication of disabled people (Mostert, 2002). Indeed, the normalization of euthanasia based upon assumed quality of life brings to the forefront eugenic preconceptions about who should, and should not inhabit the world (Hubbard, 2013). Such implicit hate speech emerges as disabled people are subject to a metanarrative scribed through the ideological fusion of eugenics and ableism which confirms a hierarchical structure of the population. This metanarrative relegates disabled

people to a level that is beyond acceptance, and is therefore inherently hateful. Indeed, the seductive, promiscuous, and persuasive promise of genetic intervention reduces disability to a metanarrative of deficit, and ultimately to a life that should be avoided. Predicated upon neo-nazi assumptions that devalue and question the existence of disabled people (Gallagher, 1995), any discursive parallel to eugenics is undoubtedly dangerous (Wolbring, 2001). With this in mind, this research will move to explore how the normalisation of modern eugenics creates a cultural intolerance of difference.

As scientific developments enter the public sphere, disablist hate speech is masked by the marking of certain bodies as genetically undesirable. Declarations that disabled people are ‘muddying up’ (Reddit, 2013a) and ‘taint[ing]’ (Reddit, 2013b) the gene pool relegates disabled people to a genetic flaw consumed by undesirability. Etymologically speaking, to ‘taint’ derives from the 1570’s, meaning to ‘corrupt or contaminate’ and from the Middle English *teynten* to ‘convict, prove guilty’ (Etymonline, 2016a). Additionally, to ‘muddy up’ or *muddelen* is to dirty or confuse (Partridge, 1958). While this may not be explicitly hateful in a conventional sense of disablist insults, disability is synonymised with notions of impurity, defilement, contamination and dirt (Kitchin, 2000) and marked out as a cause for concern that must be avoided. In doing so, disabled people are reduced to a discourse of risk, eliciting an eerie and explicit parallel to a eugenic discourse that declared disabled people as a ‘poison to the race’ (Ellis, 1927, p. 43) and ‘an evil which brings all other evils in its train’ (Dendy, 1901). Aligning to a eugenic movement that sought for social and racial cleansing, the representation of disability as deadly, poisonous, and risky is both disablist and hateful, validating once again, a metanarrative describing disability as something that ought to be thrown away and confined to the site of a dustbin. Disablist hate speech in this context, while disguised by a dialogue of genetics, makes it explicit that disability is an intrusion to the ideological fantasy of becoming ‘the master species to rule all others with no imperfections!!’ (Reddit, 2013a). For Quarmby (2011) this consideration of disability as a threat to the establishment of a superior race, is what constituted the shocking behaviours of the T4 programme those many years ago. The continued understanding of disability as genetically threatening is, therefore, a disablist expression that can be linked back to a time of horror and destruction.

It would seem then, that the cultural indoctrination of eugenic ideology ‘contaminate[s] a shared cultural space and turn[s] disabled persons into a pariah at the population level’ (Mitchell & Snyder, 2003, p. 849). Indeed, the reduction of disability to a genetic defect that

should be eradicated, normalises disablist hate speech by relying on a metanarrative that appeals to ableism. The socialisation of disablist hate speech in this context is furthered by the ‘Othering’ of disabled people to the point of animalization. The claim that society should ‘put down the downies’ (Reddit, 2012a) reveals much about the persistence of disablist insults in addition to the less than human status accorded to disabled people. The action of putting something down is synonymous with animal euthanasia and therefore makes an explicit nod towards the marking of disabled people as animals, and unworthy of life. This animalization becomes more explicit by the complaint of one Redditor that they ‘work in a tard zoo’ (Reddit, 2013c). Primordially and pejoratively applied, the marking of disabled people as animals is strategic, working ‘to externalise, to separate (from) the subject’ (Viverioros de Castro, 1998, p. 476). That is, by relegating disability to the status of animals, it creates a species-wide distance between Redditors and disabled people, affirming the superiority of one, against the inferiority of the ‘Other’. Reduced to an animal-like status, disabled people are confirmation of the anomalous, and rejected to ‘the outline of the set in which it is not a member is clarified’ (Douglas, 1966 p. 50 cited in Shakespeare, 1997, p. 228).

In addition to the establishment of ‘Other’, we must recognise that the animalization of any human is undeniably hateful, the extent to which might best be understood when considering historical discourses of racism. Research conducted by Goff et al (2008) demonstrated a bidirectional association between black people and apes. This association, they argue, underpins historic anthropological speculation of an evolutionary spectrum among primates, whereby people of African descent occupied an inferior position in between ‘the deformed and the simian’ (Goff et al, 2008). Appropriately, any such reference to black people would now cause outrage, and be marked as hateful, racist, and inappropriate. Unfortunately, the online animalisation of disabled people is socialised, and unrecognised for the similarly hateful messages and consequences that it posits. Animalisation simply adds to a metanarrative of disability that has an unquestioned presence. It does, rather than incite outrage, confirm a process of normate reductionism, as the antithetical disabled person verifies the superior non-disabled person.

It is argued then, that the socialization of disabling discourses provides the building blocks for a demeaning welfare rhetoric to emerge, built upon traditionally maintained social divisions. What follows is a critical exploration of a metanarrative built upon this hierarchical structure,

whereby the reduction of disability to a neoliberal doctrine creates a dustbin for the anxieties and fears of non-disabled people in times of austerity.

‘Why do you think you have the right to live off my hard earned earnings?’: the economics of ‘us’ against ‘them’

Neoliberalism demands from the body many things. Sculpted by pressures of neoliberal citizenship in a climate of austerity, helping ‘people along a journey toward financial independence from the state’ (DfWP, 2010, p. 31) has become a political priority. Fundamentally, this desire for independence reflects ‘a consolidation of the neoliberal vision for minimalist facilitative welfare state’ (Roulstone & Hwang, 2015, p. 850). Unfortunately, as with any ‘idealised’ body, a proliferation of the inferior ‘other’ state follows, known in this context as dependence.

Initial readings highlighted the prominent representation of disability as dependent, debilitated, and therefore, a burden to those around them. Such a representation was signified by an in house text-analysis programme of all Reddit threads, references to ‘burden’, ‘burdening’, and ‘burdensome’ were articulated a total of 199 times. In addition, ‘care’ is mentioned a striking 899 times, and the verb to ‘take’ 856 times. The propensity of these particular words construct a story of disability that is explicitly negative, predicated upon the cultural intolerance to dependence. The trope of burden becomes a defining aspect of the relationship between a parent and a disabled child, suggested to be one of ‘struggle, misery and heartbreak’ (Reddit, 2013b) as ‘raising a severely handicapped child is little more than subsidising a monetary and emotional black hole’ (Reddit, 2013b) and will, therefore, ‘destroy the lives of parents’ (Reddit, 2014a). These comments are explicitly negative, writing the role of caregiving as one of self-sacrifice that is consumed with unhappiness and devastation (Davidson, 2007; Herzl-Betz, 2015). Indeed, the westernised, neoliberal assumption that ‘the need for help from others is a bad thing’ (Mason, 2000, p. 64) distorts the lives of disabled people through the false premises of ableism. These comments are therefore understood as an attempt to dispose of the unwanted characteristics of ‘dependence’ onto disabled people.

The demonization of dependency is prominent in the portrayal of disability as an unnecessary and burdensome cost to society (Shakespeare, 1998). This stereotypical trope is magnified in austere times, and perpetuated by scandal news stories. Exposed by Garthwaite (2011),

disabled people are continually caught within the welfare rhetoric under demeaning labels, such as ‘shirkers and scroungers’. Aligned closely to this, an online rhetoric on Reddit names disabled people as ‘the scum of the earth’ (Reddit, 2011a), ‘thieves’ (Reddit, 2011b), ‘cheats’ (Reddit, 2011b), ‘scumbags’ (Reddit, 2011b), ‘leeches’ (Reddit, 2011b) and ‘fraudsters’ (Reddit, 2011b). Importantly, these phrases are explicit in their intention to demonise, and incite hatred towards disabled people and welfare recipients. Overtly negative, hurtful and derogatory, ‘these forms of disability representation naturalise the exclusion of disabled people from societies organised on labour power as a key commodity in economic production’ (Hevey, 1991, p.13). This narrative of dependency is then, disablist in itself, constituting a metanarrative that is ‘fully invested with the fantasy of self-sufficiency and in the disavowal of our (frightening) interconnectedness and our (even more frightening) dependency on a planet of rapidly depleting resources’ (Cooper, 2016, p. 132).

The feeling that the world would be ‘better’ without disabled people is frequently positioning in economic terms. This feeling is made explicit in a thread entitled ‘If the human race left natural selection [to] do its work and let those with disabilities/illnesses/injuries pass away without trying to revive them, where would we be now?’ (Reddit, 2013a) whereby expressions of society being ‘better’ without disability are articulated a total of 149 times. Signified by the proclamation that ‘these folks are a colossal waste of energy and resources’ (Reddit, 2013a) and that ‘letting them die off saves resources’ (Reddit, 2013a), the lives of disabled people become subject to economical, and political analysis and to a metanarrative of ultimate inferiority. As one Redditor comments:

‘supporting the permanently disabled is a bad investment when the cost exceeds the benefit’ (Reddit, 2014c)

Utilitarian undertones guide a cost/benefit analysis in order to quantify the quality and worth of a disabled person’s life. Within this philosophical framework, the lives of disabled people become an unattainable, and unworthy financial investment, made clear by the contention that:

‘We spend a lot of resources keeping babies alive who should otherwise die... Why are we spending millions of dollars to do this?... Why are we prolonging the lives of people who are too old and too demented to function?’ (Reddit, 2013a)

Elucidated by these comments, disabled people ‘are pushed to the margins of social worth, and constituted as a threat to social order and a challenge to the integrity of the community’ (Hughes, 2000, p. 557-558). This is made explicit in the claim that disabled people are a ‘useless burden’ (Reddit, 2013b); a comment that bears ominous parallels to the eugenic rendering of ‘useless eaters’ (Barnes, 2012) and ‘worthless people’ (Hubbard, 2013). It is suggested then, that current cost-based narratives socialise disablist attitudes by emphasising the unnecessary cost of dependency. ‘In neoliberal rhetoric, then, dependency becomes, in itself, the real fraud’ (Cooper, 2016, p. 133) to define a destructively disablist metanarrative of disability as ‘takers’ as in opposition to the hardworking neoliberal citizen.

Integral to the ‘cultural demonization’ (Dodd, 2016) of disabled people has the discursive alignment of blame and resentment to the politics of austerity. Predicated upon the belief that disabled people ‘take’ from the rest of the population (Runswick-Cole, 2014), online discourses endorse a welfare rhetoric, characterized by the markings of ‘us’ against ‘them. For example:

‘**They**’re living off our money which **we** have earned’ (Reddit, 2011b; emphasis added)

‘**You** being disabled doesn’t make **you** entitled to the efforts of those of **us** who are able-bodied’ (Reddit, 2014c; emphasis added)

‘Why do **you** think you have the right to live off **my** hard earned earnings?’ (Reddit, 2011a; emphasis added)

These comments ratify a metanarrative of disability that is consumed by the feeling of frustration at the inequality of the current welfare system. Much like the ability-disability dichotomy, the articulation of ‘us’, ‘I’, and ‘we’ requires the existence of the Other figure; the ‘them’, ‘they’, and the ‘you’. This binary logic serves to differentiate between the online user and disabled people to create a sensually and physically felt distance between different bodies, minds and capabilities. In this way, binaries are both hierarchical and value-laden (McKenna, 1992; Royle, 2003) and therefore explicate the mechanical and homogenous structure of text (Derrida, 1998) as hierarchical and divisive. Following Pennycook (1994) then, the expression of this binary demonstrates how the use of pronouns can be inherently problematic, and inevitably political. It does, to cite Dodd (2016, p. 159), denote a ‘social crisis’ whereby

‘unconstrained market forces destroy social bonds’, perpetuate illusionary population divides and confirm disabled people as dustbins for the traits rejected by neoliberalism.

Sculpted by the everyday welfare rhetoric that works to unify the neoliberal citizen against the binary Other, (Fritsche, 2015), disabled people ‘are tipped into an abyss of counterfeit citizenship and smeared as “false” mendicants’ (Hughes, 2015, p. 992). Disablist assertions such as, ‘it certainly isn’t fair that everyone else is forced to pay to subsidize the lives of disabled people’ (Reddit, 2015), appeal to the inequality of a narrative whereby ‘the ordinary working person, the taxpayer, the decent citizen, is the victim of injustice’ (Hughes, 2015, p. 994). More explicitly, the statements, ‘I am not free if my money gets stolen to feed all kinds of parasites’ (Reddit, 2014c) and ‘all parasites should perish... You do NOT have ANY right to exist on the INVOLUTARY backs of others’ (Reddit, 2015) make an overt reference to the common welfare rhetoric that infiltrates a metanarrative of disability. The naming of ‘parasite’ calls upon the Middle French *parasite*, to name ‘a hanger-on, a toady, person who lives on others’ and from Greek *parasitos* naming ‘one who lives at another’s expense, person who eats at the table of another’ (Etymonline, 2016c). Resentment, and hostility are embedded within these quotes as disabled people are marked by the frustrations of the welfare system, and made a dustbin for the disposal of the politics, devastation, and damage of austerity. This pejorative articulation of financial inequality lends itself to the construction of a neat population divide that allows for the normalisation of disablist hate speech towards the ‘Other’ subject of disability.

The affordance of online anonymity however, complicates this neat population divide. Allowing a space where users can disassociate from their everyday identity, the internet paradoxically unsettles, and settles the dichotomous and disablist plot of a welfare rhetoric.

‘Get out the throwaways’: The Ethical Conflict of Anonymity

To this point it has been established that the demonization of disabled people is fixed to a hierarchical and dichotomous metanarrative. It is, therefore, important to consider the rigidity of this binary construct when it is present in the online, and anonymous world of Reddit.

Etymologically, anonymity derives from the late Latin ‘anonymus’ (Partridge, 1958) and Greek ‘anonymos’ meaning to be ‘nameless’ (Skeat, 1965). While the opportunity to hide

identity appeals to a sense of secrecy, anonymity on Reddit is complicated by the expression of personal opinion. These personal expressions give some indication to the type of person on the other side of the computer screen, which, for Redditors included in this study, displays an alliance to the 'neoliberal hardworking taxpayer'. Both anonymous, yet explicitly identifying to the 'us' side of the binary, Redditors are able to reinforce the 'Other' of disability, marked by the demeaning articulation of welfare despite anonymous potential. Thus, the metanarrative of disability mediated on Reddit unsettles the facility of anonymity to mark identification on either side of the binary. Dissecting the use of online anonymity further, the prefix 'anon', derivative from Anglo-Saxon Britain, means 'in one moment' (Skeat, 1965). We may therefore understand online anonymous discourses as single representations of many different moments. These moments allow individuals to escape the ethical guidelines of modernity, and release their frustrations in both overt and covert ways, all of which are permitted by their anonymous and protected presence. In these moments, so-called 'keyboard-warriors' (Reddit, 2015) may release their deepest inhibitions with a significant degree of identity protection.

It is thought that ethical conflicts arise in the online domain due to the protection that anonymity affords. Previously noted by Gagnon (2013), the creation of multiple accounts on Reddit allows users to gain a sense of dissociative anonymity. Redditors are granted permission to make accounts, post comments and subsequently leave these behind, avoiding the consequences of confrontation and cause of offence. Anonymity, then, permits the 'protection of personhood' (Marx, 1999 cited in Van De Nagel, 2013) and reveals much about the restraints of offline, everyday social encounters. Through the creation of multiple, anonymous accounts it is possible for 'provocative, personal, and often-revealing aspects of a person's life [to be] offloaded into accounts and spaces that are more difficult to connect back to that person' (Gulotta et al, 2014, no page number). This reveals the underpinning awareness that Redditors may have that their opinion is controversial, and potentially harmful to the social democracy that they participate within. The endorsement of anonymity in this way is intentional, acting to disassociate regular created identities from the personal opinions of Redditors.

The anonymous, and momentary releases offered by the internet is maximised by the allowance of Redditors to create multiple identities, known on Reddit as 'throwaway accounts'. These supplementary accounts allow Reditors to post often crude and personal comments that remain disassociated from their primary Reddit account. Thus, their created 'online' and true 'offline' identity are not jeopardized in light of extreme and controversial comments. A particular

thread, entitled ‘Get out the throw-aways: dear parents of disabled children, do you regret having your child(ren) or are you happier with them in your life?’ (Reddit, 2012a), welcomed throwaway accounts, allowing users to post under ‘temporary technical identities’ (Leavitt, 2015, p. 317). Critical discourse analysis exposed this thread as incredibly controversial, providing a space for socially unpermitted opinions. The use of a throwaway account therefore offers protection for the anonymous Redditor and simultaneously facilitates hate. As one Redditor suggests, ‘the anonymity of the internet usually brings out the worst in people’ (Reddit, 2014c) as it is ‘eas[y] to just go bitch about it on the internet’ (Reddit, 2015c). A conjunction of anonymity and multiplicity creates a space where free speech, and indeed hate speech can flourish with little regulation or after-thought. Anonymity then, when manipulated, provides a protective disguise for individuals by allowing users to momentarily release controversial, personal or hateful comments without dealing with the consequences of offending people (Gagnon, 2013; Herring et al, 2002). Speaking to the ‘dustbins for disavowal’ theme that has underpinned this research, anonymity welcomes the disposal of unwelcome, unwanted, and undesirable characteristics into a dustbin that is reserved for disabled people.

It is contended then, that while the disablist attitudes embedded within a welfare rhetoric are not an acceptable commodity of society, they do in fact become so when mediated in the online domain under the protection of anonymity. Anonymity permits disablist hate speech by creating distance between online and offline identity to which hurtful comments can be articulated with little consequence. In this sense, anonymity reinforces a dichotomous welfare rhetoric when it allows for explicit, controversial and disablist comments to be articulated to the extent to which a disablist metanarrative of disability remains prominent, as does the superiority of the normate narrator. Drawing upon this, anonymity is argued to be an ethical and moral minefield, as it blurs and protects online and offline identity while simultaneously creating a space where hate speech may unquestionably and, often unnoticeably flourish.

Conclusion

As outlined in the methodology, this conclusion aligns to a structure of ‘dialectical relational’ critical discourse analysis (See Table 1), that has been developed to address the issue of online disablist hate speech. Following three stages of contextualisation, identification, and recommendation, this conclusion explores the ways in which a metanarrative of disability is produced under Hevey’s ‘dustbins for disavowal’. Appealing to the emancipatory nature of this research, this conclusion confronts the socialisation of hate speech, and subsequently recommends the directions that future research and policy reform must pursue.

Stage One | Contextualisation

Disablist hate speech is sculpted upon an online platform that objectifies disability to a dustbin for disavowal, the ultimate scapegoat for the anxieties, fears and threats of ableism. Within this dialogue, disability is feared, avoided and unappreciated in its beautiful diversity, expressed as a nightmare that must be cured, prevented and eliminated.

While acknowledging Shakespeare’s (2006) contention that it is unhelpful to make analogies between Nazi eugenics and contemporary genetic intervention, this analysis has revealed the danger when disablist hate speech takes shape through these discourses. The proliferation of the merciful killing of suffering bodies (Snyder & Mitchell, 2006), in addition to the reduction of disability to genetic flaw, echoes, and indeed re-sculpts a rhetoric that places disability on the peripheries of humanity. Similarly, reduced to the process of infantilization, the online rhetoric narrates a life that is lacking, useless, and an unnecessary burden that must be disposed of. The inherent hostility of these accusations are made clear when considering their unnerving parallel to a statement made by British physician, Dr A.F. Tredgold in 1910, claiming that:

‘idiots’ are ‘incapable of being employed... their care and support absorbs a large amount of time, energy, and money of the normal population... many... are utterly helpless, repulsive in appearance, and revolting in manners... In my opinion it would be an economical and humane procedure were their existence to be painlessly terminated’ (cited in Quarmby, 2011, p. 57)

The above excerpt is inherently and explicitly derogatory, and a very telling narrative of its time. More concerning is the parallel this presents to the disablist hate speech uncovered by this dissertation. Indeed, disablist hate speech that seeks to dehumanize, animalise, and demonise disabled people is effectively normalised when they take their place in a cultural story of austerity. Predicated upon the establishment of disability as inferior, pertinent social divides are fortified and used strategically in a bid to evoke the feelings of resentment within a story of financial inequality. Disabled people, cast as the undeserving, dependent ‘Other’, are subject to a process of normate reductionism, and made to serve a cultural purpose. That is, a metanarrative is made to dispose unwanted traits onto disabled people, and dispose of ‘them’ also.

Stage Two | Identification

The rhetorical process of dehumanization creates a foundation, upon which a eugenic doctrine of disability may flourish. This therefore persists as a pertinent cultural barrier to challenging disablist hate speech. Justified by a climate of genetic desirability, human enhancement, and austerity, disability becomes the antithesis of what is considered human (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2016) and the dustbin for all attributes that do not align to ableist expectations. Linguistically caught in this process, disabled people are ‘reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one’ (Goffman, 1963, p. 12). The role of disablist hate speech then, is to de-sensitise and normalise a discourse of intervention, avoidance and, ultimately, extermination. In line with Williams & Bendelow (1998, p. 47), it is argued that this positioning of ‘deviance is necessary for the symbolic (re)affirmation of collective sentiments and the ritual (re)enforcement of moral boundaries’. That is, by creating an ideological division between disability and humanity, online disablist hate speech excludes disabled people from the protection of ethical and moral considerations of personhood, providing justificatory grounding for hate speech to occur. Indeed, as Tsesis (2002, p. 88) reminds us, ‘a violation of ethical norms is easier to explain if the victims belong to an outgroup and are widely portrayed as demonic adversaries who are purportedly menacing to the population’. The metanarrative of disability that is predicated upon a binary logic is therefore a crux upon which disablist hate speech is expressed, and accepted in the online domain.

Anonymity, despite its potential to disrupt the canonical dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’, remains a barrier to tackling online disablist hate speech. Although immediate identification is removed,

it has been found that anonymity catalyses a binary logic, whereby users are able to express hate freely, and confirm their position as ‘us’ or ‘them’. Anonymity is ethically conflicted, and signifies the complexity of approaching the issue of online disablist hate speech. This dissertation has only begun to address this challenge, and certainly cannot offer a definitive solution. However, based upon the findings of this research, online anonymity, when facilitating the protection of one individual over the destruction and diminishment of another is unacceptable, and remains a pertinent barrier to tackling online disablist hate speech.

It is necessary to add that Reddit has begun to address the issues associated with online anonymity. Previously, moderators had been able to ‘shadowban’ individuals, meaning that while users could continue to post these posts would be hidden from other Redditors. This process has recently been replaced, in favor of account suspensions. In addition, Reddit has also begun to dissolve and ban hate-themed subreddits. Despite this, it must be recognized that a large amount of hate speech remains on Reddit, only some of which is discussed in this dissertation. Implicitly and explicitly articulated, disablist hate speech is articulated despite efforts of prevention. Therefore, future work is needed to address the loopholes of the online domain that remain.

Stage 3 | Recommendations

With the findings of this research in mind, we must re-consider the issue of political disparity highlighted in the literature review of this dissertation, and more specifically the call to include disability under the offence of *Stirring up Hatred*. The hate speech that this dissertation has uncovered has been built upon a culturally scribed metanarrative of disability. Within this narrative, disabled people are made subject to a binary logic that seeks to relegate their position within society from human, to ‘Other’, and from ‘us’ to ‘them’. Disablist hate speech therefore, does incite hostility, strategically stirring up the emotions of the public predicated upon a political plot of welfare reduction, complimented by the dehumanization of disabled people. Based upon these findings, it is argued that policy reform is necessary in order to effectively prohibit the expression of disablist hate speech. It is integral that these socially accepted narratives are confronted and resisted for their demeaning, derogatory, and hateful intentions.

In addition to policy reform, it is hoped that the findings of this research will illuminate an area of scholarship that is in urgent need of future focus. Future research must continue to expose

instances of disablist hate speech in the online domain if it is to be recognized politically, with particular reference to the inclusion of disability under *The Public Order Act (1986)*. In addition, it is imperative that future research works with disabled people to explore their experiences of online hate speech. This participatory approach would challenge the prejudice embedded within disablist hate speech, while also demanding political and organizational recognition. Finally, research must continue to deconstruct a welfare rhetoric, and reveal both the pervasive and aversive disablism that it allows. We must resist a metanarrative of disability that has been hijacked by neoliberal ideology and the politics of austerity.

Final Thoughts

This analysis has revealed an underlying metanarrative of disability that underpins the expression of disablist hate speech on the online bulletin board, Reddit. A narrative is constructed via the persistent dehumanization, demonization and subjugation of disabled people. A dialogue is shared on the internet that is diverse in style; both implicit and explicit, yet inherently hateful and persistently demeaning. This metanarrative of disability questions, devalues and disrespects the lives of disabled people, using them as dustbins to dispose of the unwanted traits of neoliberalism. Revealed by critical discourse analysis, and consolidated within a conclusive three-stage model, disablist hate speech, formulated upon a metanarrative of disability, fortifies a dialogue to which disability becomes a dustbin for the disavowals of ableism. Reduced to the confinements of this narrative, online disablist hate speech, blurred by the linguistics of a welfare rhetoric, is culturally, politically, and socially normalised.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

An Example of Descriptive Coding

[...] Neitsyt_Marian ◉ 14 points 4 years ago
She had to always be in a lying down position and on a ventilator. If you could choose, would you want to live ² your life that way? *assumed quality of life*

And I think that's the main thing to take away from all this. **Would you ever want to live that brief, horrible life? Unable to communicate, reduced and prideless?**

permalink source save-RES parent

[...] atuan ◉ 23 points 4 years ago
This whole thread is making me angry at the pro-lifers and the Schiavo, keep them on life support crowd. Death has a place in this world and it pisses me off that people think that "life" is always the most important thing, even when it is a fate worse than death.

permalink source save-RES parent

[...] [deleted] 4 points 4 years ago
I am a strong proponent of assisting **severely defective individuals** in going towards the afterlife. It seems the most **humane method for them and for us.** *language*

permalink source save-RES parent *death - euthanasia*

[...] Gabranth ◉ 18 points 4 years ago
I absolutely agree. Also, making babies is not that hard. If one baby turns out messed up, dispose of it and go make ³ another one. **All this money and pain and horror thrown at a dysfunctional organism instead of turning around and making one that works better.** I don't get it. *cost - not worth economic cost.*

permalink source save-RES parent

[...] [deleted] 4 points 4 years ago
This was the most uplifting thing I've read in this thread.

permalink source save-RES parent

[...] rere456 ◉ 9 points 4 years ago
Upvoted. Agreed.

Appendix 1 | Descriptive Coding

Image shows a scanned document demonstrated the use of different coloured highlighters to identify themes within the text.

Appendix 2

An Example of Analytical Coding

Original Text	Theme	Title
You have no right to demand free money for invalids	Lanuguage AND Rights Neoliberal	IAmA person who lives of disability
but they don't understand what they are doing when they are having sex with another individual.	A-sexual /Incapable	I believe all mentally disabled people should be sterilized. CMV.
Get out the throw-aways	Anonymity	Get out the throw-aways: dear parents of disabled children, do you regret having your child(ren) or are you happier with them in your life?
I've always wondered but I never really had the balls to ask someone in person.	Anonymity	Get out the throw-aways: dear parents of disabled children, do you regret having your child(ren) or are you happier with them in your life?
I don't think you have to worry about mentally handicapped people reproducing,	Asexual	If the human race left natural selection do its work and let those with disabilities/illnesses/injuries pass away without trying to revive them, where would we be now?
Two people who are disabled enough that they can't work, who are married to eachother, are of child bearing health, are on welfare AND actually want to have kids? ... this seems to astronomically uncommon	Asexual/ reproductive rights	CMV: If you have a mental disability that is debilitating to the point where you have to live off welfare, you shouldn't be allowed to have kids. If you do decide to have kids, then your disability isn't as severe as you make it out to be
She has no joy in her life	Blame AND Burden	I don't see the joy in raising a mental handicapped child CMV
you are a prisoner to your own offspring.	Blame AND Burden	I don't see the joy in raising a mental handicapped child CMV
This child destroyed a loving family, and it's all I can think about when people talk about raising the mentally handicapped;	Blame AND Burden	I don't see the joy in raising a mental handicapped child CMV
they only cause unhappiness for their families	Burden	I believe that children with severe mental handicaps should be killed at birth. CMV.
ruin the loving people around them.	Burden	I believe that children with severe mental handicaps should be killed at birth. CMV.
We are talking about fetuses with severe MENTAL handicaps, who will always be a burden to their family; financially, mentally.	Burden	I believe that children with severe mental handicaps should be killed at birth. CMV.
the families wouldn't be sentenced to a lifetime together of struggle, misery and heartbreak.	Burden	I believe that children with severe mental handicaps should be killed at birth. CMV.
a lot of the times parents who have a severely mentally handicapped baby would have additional children if they didn't have to take care of the severely mentally handicapped one.	Burden	I believe that children with severe mental handicaps should be killed at birth. CMV.

Appendix 2 | Analytical Coding

A table showing a subset of data extracted through descriptive coding, and sorted by theme.