**'You are a parasite on the productive classes': online disablist hate speech in austere times.**

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**Introduction**

Following the financial crisis of 2008, the election of a Coalition government promised to create a welfare system that was 'fairer, more affordable and better able to tackle poverty, worklessness and welfare dependency' (Department for Work and Pensions 2010). In an attempt to banish a 'sickness culture' (Cameron 2010), a series of welfare cuts commenced. Such cuts were premised upon the expectation that we must overcome economic downturn by responding to the stringent conditions of austerity (Goodley, Lawthom, and Runswick-Cole 2014). That is, we are expected to embody the ideologies of neoliberalism, by sculpting our minds and bodies to be self-serving, self-responsible and productive (Goodley and Runswick-Cole 2015). These changing economic relationships have transformed citizenship to maximise the role of economic production and individual responsibility. Marking a poignant shift from unconditional citizenship, the current status of citizen is that of 'taxpayer,' an agent obligated 'to work and function as a "self-sufficient" actor in the market' (Schram et al. 2010, 743). Under this transactional approach to citizenship, the government has implemented a residual model of welfare, in which the individual bears the responsibility of their actions if they come from their own "poor choices" (Lantz and Marston 2012, 859). That is, welfare becomes a 'safety net' (Ellison 2016), meaning the 'choice' to receive welfare support can be penalised and marked out.

To justify these changes to welfare, politicians and media outlets have adopted a strategic narrative. That is, they have expressed pity for 'hardworking taxpayers' who have been portrayed as the real victims of financial instability (Cameron, 2010; UK Gov 2015; Hughes 2015). At the same time, we have witnessed a surge in vitriolic welfare rhetoric that brands welfare recipients, and many disabled people, as 'scroungers,' 'cheats,' and 'scum' (Briant,

Watson, and Philo 2013, 2011; Garthwaite 2011). In turn, a cultural narrative has been established, to which disabled people have become the 'new folk devil' (Briant, Watson, and Philo 2013), 'tipped into an abyss of counterfeit citizenship and smeared as "false" mendicants' (Hughes 2015, 992). These representations are detrimental, as the portrayal of disabled people as a financial drain on society and a personal burden to 'taxpayers' is likely to impact the relationship between disabled and non-disabled people (Goodley and Runswick-Cole 2015; Hoong Sin 2015; Novis 2013; Quarmby 2011, 2013; Yeo and Moore 2003). Indeed, backed by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD 2016, 14), it is suggested that the portrayal of disabled people as 'dependent or making a living out of benefits, committing fraud as benefit claimants, being lazy and putting a burden on taxpayers' may have led to the rise in 'disability hate crimes' that have been recorded by the police in recent years.

Austerity, therefore, provides a ready context for analysis, particularly in relation to the prevalence of online hate speech. The growth of the World Wide Web has revolutionised communication. 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), and 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). For Banks (2010, p.234), the internet creates a 'new frontier' for spreading hate 'as millions can be reached through an inexpensive and encumbered social network.' According to this stream of works, the manipulation of the facilities offered by the internet provides a strengthened infrastructure for the proliferation and reproduction of hate speech (Cornwell and Orbe 1999; Elbahtimy 2014). Most notably documented by scholars in the field of race studies (Adams and Roscigno 2005; Chau and Xu 2007; Duffy 2003; Lee and Leets 2002), the internet creates a venue for bullying and online hate to take place (Brennan 2009) without the geographical and indeed, moral constraints of the everyday physical world (Duffy 2003).

The internet presents a multitude of unique sites of boundless communication across the globe, and therefore, 'a dataset that can be subject to criminological inspection' (Williams and Burnap 2016, 215). An extensive dataset is, however, too large to efficiently explore in this small research project. Consequently, for the purpose of this piece of research, the online bulletin board, Reddit was the chosen site of analysis. Reddit can be described as 'a pretty open platform

and free speech place' (Reddit 2015d). The value that this site places upon the right to anonymity and free speech has attracted an estimated total of 234 million users (DMR 2016) from over 215 different countries (Reddit 2015a), and over 853,824 Subreddits to date (DMR 2016). Based upon these statistics, it is assumed that this site attracts cultural, geographical and ideological diversity that can be subject to analysis.

In order to theorise the context of austerity in relation to online disablist hate speech, this paper finds use in the work of David Hevey (1991), in particular his concept 'dustbins for disavowal.' This concept offers a theoretical framework to understand the objectification of disabled people to cultural scribed narratives. The purpose of such narratives is to dispose of the anxieties, frustrations, and fears that one has towards the objected Other. In this process, disabled people are reduced to 'objects, on to which artists project particular emotions' (Shakespeare 1997, 222). This objectification has been cultivated through and by a metanarrative of disability that serves a purpose of validation for non-disabled people. Aiming to reveal this metanarrative, this article follows the work of David Bolt (2014), who in his exploration of blindness in twentieth-century Anglophone writing, shows how a metanarrative of disability is constructed by, and for, non-disabled people. This metanarrative, it is suggested, is taken up by perpetrators of disablist hate speech as a means of comparing their sense of identity, worth, and value to disabled people. In terms of this research, I will reveal how such a metanarrative is created through the articulation of online disablist hate speech, and how disabled people have been storied to particularly negative characters in the process.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to emerging conversations regarding the relationship between austerity and growing levels of online hostility. This relationship is considered with central focus upon disability. First, this article maps some of the current literature surrounding the concept of hate speech to identify the absence of disability. What this section notes, importantly, is that little work has been done to connect work on disablist hate crime and disablist hate speech to wider scholarly debates on these criminal offences. Next, a brief methodological discussion outlines the use of CDA as an approach to analysis. Finally, this article analyses the existence of online disablist hate speech on Reddit, within the broader context of austerity and welfare dependency. The analysis also discusses some of the barriers to tackling this speech on the internet, with a particular interest in the role of anonymity in constructing online and offline identities.

**'Dustbins for Disavowal': the normalisation of disablism**

To research online disablist hate speech reveals a single, yet compelling finding; it lacks any sophisticated existence in current academic literature. For example, at the time of writing this piece, I am aware of only three research papers that engage with the topic of online disablist hate speech. In two papers, Burnap and Williams (2016; 2015) identify the use of 'Othering' language on Twitter, based upon race, disability and sexual orientation. Noting the lack of available legislation to prosecute online hate speech, as well as the difficulties in policing these instances in relation to their intersectionality, Burnap and Williams (2016) attempt to develop a machine classification system that can code Tweets and explore the intersections of oppression that underpin hate speech. In the third paper, Alhaboby et al. (2016) use an online survey to explore the personal impacts of experiencing disability related cyber-hate and cyber-harassment. Although all three of these papers acknowledge the issue of disablist language, they fail to connect this to wider discourses surrounding hate speech. This could, of course, demonstrate that the problem of disablist hate speech is not an issue deserving of extensive consideration, however the vast number of studies that have presented the abuse, discrimination and exclusion of disabled people suggest that this is not the case.

The exclusion, discrimination, and abuse of disabled people throughout history has been well documented. It has been found that a significant number of people with learning difficulties have negative experiences in their communities, and may be 'bullied' on a weekly or daily basis (Beadle-brown et al. 2014). While respondents recognised that these experiences could be distressing, they accepted them as an inevitable aspect of daily life. Similarly, research conducted by Mind in 2007 found that people with mental health issues were at significant risk of victimization. In particular, they were likely to be called terms such as "schizo" and "freak" during their daily navigations of the social world (Mind 2007). Findings presented by Macdonald (2015) has also recognised the commonplace nature of 'hate incidents' such as 'verbal abuse' for many disabled people. Indeed, hate speech, or verbal abuse as it is so often termed, is suggested to occur regularly on the university campus (Munn 2015), on public transport (Olsen, Pepe, and Redfearn 2017), and on the street (Brookes and Cain 2015; Smith 2015). Among others (EHRC 2012; Quarmby 2011; Roulstone and Mason-Bish 2013), these findings demonstrate that hate expressions have become a mundane intrusion to the lives of many disabled people, a 'constant drip, drip, nag, nag of the so-called "low-level harassment' (EHRC 2011). Such findings are consistent with the earlier work of Quarmby (2008), who has

critiqued the 'casual disablism' that permeates our society and the tolerance towards these encounters as a result. Indeed, to refer to Mark Deal's (2007) coining of 'aversive disablism,' following on from earlier work by Dovidio & Gaertner (2004), the normality of disablism has become an unacknowledged feature of society, and a seemingly accepted experience for disabled people. On a personal level, for example, the regularity of disablist incidents can have a blurring effect, which prevents individuals from distinguishing between what is and is not acceptable (Brookes and Cain 2015; Hollomotz 2013; Smith 2015). Indeed, while intrusive and more implicit practices and expressions of hate are not often viewed as harmful, they are intrinsically linked to more severe acts of violence (Hollomotz 2013).

Hate crime and hate speech harms in a multiplicity of ways. As proposed by Iganski (2008), the 'harms' of hate are not solely experienced within the realm of an individual. Instead, harms transgress boundaries, moving between personal, social, and cultural spaces. It seems the case, however, that disablist hate speech has become normalised to the point that its harms are not recognised. For example, research conducted by the Anti-Bullying Alliance (n.d) report that almost 70% of respondents had heard children using the words 'spaz', 'spastic', 'retard', and 'mong' in the school environment. They also noted that 44% of adult admitted to using such terminology as they were in casual conversation with others. The harm here operates on a number of levels, not only contributing to the reproduction of negative cultural representations but simultaneously continuing to blur the boundaries between what is, and is not, acceptable.

As Levin writes:

> '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, 99)

Levin's evaluation of the 'nasty labels' associated with disability suggests that there may be different rules and regulations about 'hateful' rhetoric depending upon the identity characteristic that it targets. Significantly, disablist hate speech is often coated by the terminological veil of 'banter' in order to justify its use on a day-to-day basis (Levin 2013). Indeed, the justification of unjust behaviour as 'banter' was recently used by the current

President of the United States, Donald Trump. In his 'apology' over his claims to 'moving onto a woman like a bitch' (quoted in Eroukhmanoff 2017), the President attempted to play off the severity of his suggestions under the label of 'locker room banter.' In reality, the comments made have elicited gender constructions which position female bodies as objects to male dominance (Eroukhmanoff 2017). Although this case has quite rightly received worldwide media attention, the coating of disablist hate speech under the guise of banter rarely provokes a recognition or response. This suggests that there are culturally scripted, yet equally blurred lines between 'banter' and 'hate speech' when disability is the subject of discussion.

**Regulating the boundaries of hate speech**

In the United Kingdom, the issue of hate crime and hate speech can most notably be tied to the murder of Stephen Lawrence, whose tragic death and unlawful legislative response provided a watershed moment for an awareness of racist hate crime (Tyson, Giannasi, and Hall 2015). In addition, this moment also provided an opportunity for other oppressed groups to gain recognition, whose voices had, to this point, been unheard (Hall 2015). Thus, on slightly wider terms, Simpson (2013) defines hate speech as verbal conduct that expresses intense antipathy towards an individual perceived to identify with a certain ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. For Schulzke (2016, 225), hate speech is that which 'is meant to offend, exclude, intimidate, or discriminate against members of a group based on the members' race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, nationality or ethnicity.' More recently, research has called for the recognition of misogynist sexual advances, such as 'cat-calling' as a type of hate speech (Mackenzie 2016; Townsend 2016) as well as hostility expressed against 'alterative subcultures' (Garland and Hodkinson 2014). Despite these disciplinary developments, current policy provisions in England and Wales remain limited in breadth.

The policy framework in England and Wales is suggested to be one of the most advanced at tackling hate crime in the world to date (Giannasi, 2017; Tyson et al. 2015). The Crime and Disorder Act (1998) details specific offences of racially and religiously (as amended in 2001) aggravated crimes, such as wounding, assault, damage, and harassment. In addition, the Criminal Justice Act (2003) provides provisions for increased sentencing on the grounds that hostility on the basis of race, religion, disability, sexual orientation or transgender identity can be proven as a motivation for the criminal offence. Finally, under sections 18-23 and 29B-29F of the Public Order Act (1986), it is an offence to use 'threatening, abusive or insulting words

or behaviour' to incite/stir up hatred in relation to race, religion, and/or sexual orientation. What is apparent, however, is that there are discrepancies within these policies that exclude particular identity categories. The exclusion of disability from the Public Order Act is particularly concerning, as it carries with it the possibility to prosecute hate speech as a recognisable crime in the criminal justice system. Although hate crime policies have notable shortfalls (Meyer 2014), particularly in relation to the way in which they bolster a 'recognition politics' that pushes those groups with fewer resources and opportunities to the peripheries (Al-Hakim 2015; Mason-Bish 2014), they also have merits. Hate crime policies carry a significant symbolic message to society that particular acts are not acceptable (Jenness and Grattet 2004). It is problematic, then, that whilst policy provisions are in place for tackling both hate crime and hate speech, they present a lack of unity in response to different characteristics (Owsusu-Bempah 2015) and, as a result, preserve a hierarchy of identity (Chakraborti 2015).

Discrepancies in this policy area have recently been revised by the Law Commission (2014). In their report, they conclude by recommending to the government that the extension of the offence 'stirring up hatred,' to include disability and gender identity is not necessary. This decision, they suggest, appeals to the lack of sufficient evidence that any extension of this policy would be valuable (Law Commission 2014). The report similarly notes that the existing offences of harassment, alarm, and distress may already provide legislative protection for some of these instances, thus reducing the need for the extension (Law Commission 2014). While these are important provisions to be in place, they do not adequately address the problem of hate speech that many disabled people face. Rather, the reluctance to move beyond these offences results in a masking effect that reduces the inherent violence of 'disablist hate speech.' Further justification was offered in terms of the increasing resentment that the prosecution of disablist hate speech might create due to the 'perception of creeping censorship and thought control' (Law Commission 2014, 189). The levying of free speech against hate speech causes increasing concern in relation to a rising levels of online hate and will be explored in more detail in the analysis of this paper. Thus, while the Law Commission report does acknowledge that a lack of disparity among the protected characteristics may send the message that certain characteristics are treated less seriously by the law (Law Commission 2014), their conclusion is disappointing.

**Methodology**

This qualitative research employs a critical discourse analysis (CDA) in order to unearth and confront the existence of disablist hate speech upon the online bulletin board, Reddit. Discourse is inseparable from its surrounding world (Souto-Manning 2014) as it shapes, and is shaped by, overarching cultural systems and structures (Fairclough 2013). By critically considering discourse as it is expressed in the online domain, it is possible to reveal the underlying regimes of power and inequality (Blommeart 2005; Fairclough 1992; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Liasidou 2011) that are inextricably interwoven within our cultural make-up. We can consider hate speech to be an artefact 'of *discourse,'* a discursive expression that is 'socially constitutive as well as socially disabling' (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 6). A CDA is employed in order to draw out these expressions, as well as explore the context to within which they occur.

Concerned with the discursive aspect of social problems (Van Dijk 1996),  a CDA aims to expose the social wrong of disablement as it is expressed upon online platforms. Considering the power inequalities that are often bound to social problems, Grue (2015, 5) recommends the use of CDA in order to 'uncover the ways in which disability- and disablement- is constructed, administered, and policed through the socially and bureaucratically embedded use of language'. That is, the way in which a dominant 'us' is both produced and reinforced by discursively marking out the specified shortfalls of the 'Other.' 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 and Coupland 2006) working to expose and critique the relationship between discourse and social wrongs (Fairclough 2015). This approach, therefore, aims to unveil the influences, ideologues and values that are characteristically rejected by non-disabled people and thrown into a metanarrative of disability as presented on Reddit.

In order to manage such a large database, specific search terms were used to identify Reddit threads that were of relevance to this research project. Based upon previous research that has already outlined some of the key terms associated with welfare dependency and disability (Briant, Watson, and Philo 2013, 2011; Garthwaite 2011; Quarmby 2008), the terms 'disability,' 'disabled,' 'scrounger,' 'shirker,' 'welfare,' 'benefit/benefit claimant,' 'cheat,' and 'fraud' were searched for. 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 (Public Law 2010, 111-256). Although this

was swiftly followed by ruling of the Social Security Administration in 2013, which replaced the term 'mental retardation' with 'intellectual disability' in the Federal Register (Federal Register 2013), US culture is yet to dispose of this derogatory label.

A total of 24 Reddit threads and 16,908 comments were descriptively and analytically coded. The first stage, descriptive coding, began to pull out emerging themes. The re-reading of the discourse, analytic coding, aimed to critically decipher and interpret the data (Böhm 2004). This second stage refined and developed descriptive codes into a thematically consolidated set of analytic codes. Many themes arose during the coding process that were not associated with the topic of welfare, such as the use of disability as a pun for a joke, and the infantilization of disabled people. However, in order to maintain a concise focus, disablist hate speech was explored as it was contextualised by a climate of austerity. The first section of this analysis explores how representations of welfare dependency create a metanarrative of disability as an economic expense to the rest of society. Next, the operation of hate speech on the internet is considered, with a particular focus upon how anonymity and claims to free speech serves to justify hateful expressions and thus, present a major barrier to overcome. Finally, this paper brings the findings together, using the conclusions from this research to offer new directions for recognising and responding to online disablist hate speech that will bring together a multiplicity of different agencies, experiences, and expertise.

**Analysis**

**Us against Them: *'Why do you think you have the right to l*ive off my hard earned earnings?**

Early readings of the selected Reddit threads revealed the widespread use of disablist language within the context of austerity and welfare dependency. Constructing clear parallels to the language of austerity that has been broadcast across many media outlets, comments labelled welfare recipients and disabled people 'scum of the earth' (Reddit 2011b), 'thieves,' 'cheats,' 'leeches,' and 'fraudsters' (Reddit 2011a). Such terms have familiarity in recent times due to their widespread use as political tools. That is, they have sought to capture the attention and the emotions of the public during a period of financial instability (Garthwaite 2011). This language, as previously suggested, has confirmed a story of inequality. A similarly emotionally incited script emerged on Reddit, predicated upon the understanding that 'it certainly isn't fair that everyone else is forced to pay to subsidize the lives of disabled people' (Reddit 2015b).

The claims, for example, that 'they're living off the money which we have earned' (Reddit 2015b) and that 'you being disabled doesn't make you entitled to the efforts of those of us who are able-bodied' (Reddit 2014) ratify a metanarrative of disability that is consumed by the feeling of frustration at the perceived inequality underpinning the welfare system.

The establishment of boundaries is integral to the storyline that is played out on Reddit. As illustrated in the comments above, many rely upon dichotomous pronouns as a means of confirming who they perceive to be 'I,' 'us,' and 'we,' in comparison to 'them,' 'they,' and 'you.' Following Pennycook (1994), these comments illustrate how the use of pronouns can be inherently problematic, and inevitably political in the pursuit to distance oneself from the nominated Other figure. Such boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorise people and, in turn, present particular realities (INSERT LAMONT REF HERE). 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. Indeed, pronouns express the exact divisions that one is making, which in this case, is the hardworking taxpayer against the disabled Other, that is, the so-called fraud, cheat, and scum. Developing this narrative, some Redditors refer to their Others as 'parasites.' The naming of 'parasites' has been called into disability studies in the early beginnings, employed by Paul Hunt as a means of condemning the 'parasite people' who had contributed to disability oppression through their research (Hunt 1981). This term has come to take on a different meaning and target, however, charged with the emotions of austerity. Calling upon the story of injustice as a means of contextualising the use of this explicitly denigrating terminology, one user states that 'I am not free if my money gets stolen to feed all kinds of parasites' (Reddit 2014). Here, the synonymising of disability with 'parasites' makes an explicit tug towards a narrative in which 'the ordinary working person, the taxpayer, the decent citizen, is the victim of injustice' (Hughes 2015, 994)

The use of 'parasites' as a means of identifying and marking out disability is supported by the relationship between welfare and employment, to which the first is presented as inferior to the latter. Making this connection, one user argues 'you are a parasite on the productive class' (Reddit 2014), thus confirming that the disabled figure is not only unproductive, but burdensome to those who are productive. Indeed, one user explains the importance of

productivity, suggesting that 'if you want anything in life, you have to work for it' (Reddit, 2015d). Another user claims, 'all parasites should perish… You do NOT have ANY right to exist on the INVOLUNTARY backs of others' (Reddit 2015b). The use of capital letters here signifies the anger felt by this user, regarding so-called 'parasites' who rely upon the hard work of other citizens. Overtly negative and explicitly 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, 13). Drawing out the way in which identities are established and rejected, a metanarrative of disability is established 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, 132). In the context of welfare then, disablist hate speech may emerge as a product of this 'social crisis' whereby 'unconstrained market forces destroy social bonds' (Dodd 2016, 159). Indeed, it would appear that to 'succeed' within a climate of financial instability, one has to take part in the competition. Such a competition encourages self-individualism and, in turn, discourages our natural moral and ethical interdependency, to which we all help and give to one another.

In this way, these comments similarly illustrate a sense of the narrator's self-identification. Specifically, the way in which disablist language is used as a means of showcasing and performing one's own aspiration to, and evidence of, being normal (Bolt 2016). Much like gender, 'ableness' becomes performed by individuals, demonstrating 'the repeated stylization of the body' in order to aspire to 'a natural sort of being' (Bulter 1990, 33). The performance of ableism in this way demonstrates how the 'normative shadows' of ableism haunt one's sense of ontological security (Overboe 2009). In turn, ableism is able to shape how we understand ourselves in relation to those around us (Wolbring 2008). From this perspective, ableism operates through the process of 'osmosis,' that is, 'via the gradual absorption of ideas that results from continual exposure' (Bolt 2015, 1106). This process gains social and personal desirability as notions of 'ableness' are produced within a myriad of normative assumptions about how the mind and body should operate productively, all of which are particularly charged in austere times. This suggests that disablism has been taken up by a culture infatuated with the fallacies of ableism in a time of austerity, as the neoliberal-ableist requirement to be work-ready 'breeds paranoia, confusion, fear and inadequacy' (Goodley 2014, xi). The inherent desire to distinguish boundaries in this way relates to wider understandings of hate speech as a mechanism of dehumanization (Iganski and Levin 2015; Taylor 2012; Tsesis 2002). Hate

speech preserves unequal power relations by denigrating the Other while simultaneously bolstering the superiority of the speaker. Indeed, it is often the case that 'hate crimes' are committed to reinforce the process of marginalisation, not simply because the perpetrator 'hates' the target (Mason-Bish 2013).

**The question of life:** ***'Put down the downies so we can use the resources for something else'***

Appealing to the ideologies of neoliberalism, the 'social crisis' of austerity drives upon the notion of individualism, demarcating community spirit with the mantra of 'every man for himself'. Within this individualist culture, the Other becomes a threat, and in turn, can cause the emotion of hate to emerge at a dangerous pace (Sternberg & Sternberg 2008). Explored in detail by Bauman (1989), the perception of threat provided one ground to which the abuse and murder of many Jewish people could be justified upon in the early 1900's. He suggests, 'whoever felt thrown out of balanced, threatened or displaced, could easily – and rationally-make sense of his anxiety through articulating the experienced turbulence as an imprint of Jewish subversive incongruity' (Bauman 1989, 45). Threat, whether to personal self-esteem, or to society more broadly creates a dangerous pathway to the escalation of hate. Indeed, within a climate of austerity and financial instability, concern with potential threats have been extensively endorsed. This culture is evident in the claims that 'supporting the permanently disabled is a bad investment when the cost exceeds the benefit' (Reddit 2014), 'we shouldn't be spending more money to accommodate those who will not contribute to society in any meaningful way' (Reddit 2012), 'the impact of not having to care for the weak and powerless would have incredible economic benefits to society' (Reddit 2013b). The message is clear: 'these folks are a colossal waste of energy and resources' (Reddit 2013b). Such comments push disabled people to the margins of social worth, justified by their perceived threat to the established social order (Hughes 2000). Positioning disability upon these peripheries moves disablist hate speech to a realm of eugenic orthodoxy and incites further violence.

Disablist hate speech that is situated within a rhetoric of welfare dependency transforms into expressions of deep-rooted hatred towards disabled people, who are presented as objects to be disposed of. That is, the portrayal of disabled people as dependent, a burden, and therefore a waste, awakens the eugenic logic that these people are 'muddying up' (Reddit 2013b) the gene pool. Such a narrative indeed echoes the justification of mass murder and sterilisation of

disabled people in the twentieth century, premised on the conclusion that disabled people are a 'poison to the race' (Ellis 1927, 43) and 'an evil which brings all other evils in its train' (Dendy 1901). One user notes that 'if we killed children with severe mental handicaps, we may eliminate the small chance that they taint the overall human gene pool' (Reddit 2013a) and another, put more explicitly, suggests that we should 'put down the downies so we can use resources for something else' (Redditor 2012). 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.

The underlying operation of eugenic ideology within discussions surrounding welfare dependency, and economic cost is detrimental to attitudes towards disabled people in modern times. As Mitchell and Snyder (2003, 849) write, the remnants of eugenics in modern society 'contaminate a shared cultural space and turns disabled persons into a pariah at the population level.' This peripheral positioning is dangerous, as it allows extremely harmful attitudes and suggestions, such as murder, to be unquestionably accepted when articulated within the context of economic cost. Disability, in this context, is presented as 'deformed, maimed, mutilated, broken, diseased' (Davis 1995, 5), consequently rendering the lives of disabled people as 'absolutely pointless' (Burleigh 1994, 17). 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). It is dangerous as it incites an inherently violent rhetoric around the existence of disabled people in our world. Disabled people, within this narrative, are made subject to a process of '(human) waste disposal,' to which 'unfit, invalid or unviable human relations [are] born with the mark of impending wastage' (Bauman (2004, 7). Marked in this way, disabled people are presented as an infringement to the economic and genetic advancement of society.

'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, 56). This analysis has shown how the emotions of austerity are captured within online disablist hate speech, and seek to validate socially constructed binaries between disabled and non-disabled people. This distance, as it has been

argued, is fundamental to the creation of a metanarrative of disability constructed to support culturally chosen stories. Stories of welfare dependency and financial instability, for example, provide a site for disablist hate speech to thrive, as the anxieties and fears that arise as a result of austerity, can be pushed aside and projected onto the Other figure of disability. This act of scapegoating underpins much of the hate speech presented in this paper, as disabled people 'are used to represent values or evils' (Shakespeare 1997, 223) that are bolstered during particular times and contexts. In this process, disabled people are rendered as litter ready for disposal, and expected to incontestably take on the rejected characteristics of ableism in neoliberal times. Such a process is inherently hateful, as it manipulates the narratives of disabled people to one that secures the hierarchy structurally bound to ableist relations as they are constructed and reconstructed by a rhetoric of welfare dependency.

### Online anonymity and free speech: 'Get out the throwaways'

Anonymity presents both opportunity and danger in relation to widening global participation on the online domain. Reddit endorses this feature of the internet, allowing users to create multiple accounts known on the site as 'throwaways.' Throwaway accounts allow users to engage online under 'temporary technical identities' (Leavitt 2015, 317) which, in turn, presents a significant degree of dissociative anonymity (Gagnon 2013). That is, through the creation of multiple accounts that are easily disposed of, 'provocative, personal, and often-revealing aspects of a person's life [can be] offloaded into accounts and spaces that are more difficult to connect back to that person' (Gullota et al. 2014 no p.n.). Indeed, comments posted on Reddit suggest that online anonymity is allowing the easier distribution of hate speech. For example, in a 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 2012), the use of a throwaway encourages honest communication, as offline identities are less easily traced. Indeed, many of the comments within this particular thread were explicitly negative, derogatory and dehumanizing regarding the subject of disability. Comments, for example, that disability 'is not life worth living' (Reddit 2012) and that 'we should euthanize infants,' present a lack of consciousness in the stories of disability being told. In addition, the use of language was explicitly disablist, such as 'special needs adult,' 'fucking retards,' 'this downie kid,' and 'retard baby' (Reddit 2012).

The impact of online anonymity to the way in which people engage with hateful language on the internet was recognised by some users. For example, when asking someone about the experience of disability, one user admits 'I've always wondered but I never really had the balls to ask someone in person' (Reddit 2012). Others argue that 'the anonymity of the internet usually brings out the worst in people' (Reddit 2014) and that having back-up Reddit accounts allows them to move onto another once their primary one has been blocked (Reddit 2015b). More critical of anonymity, one user calls out 'keyboard warriors' (Reddit 2015b) and another explains that 'it is easier to just bitch about it on the internet' (Reddit 2015b). This suggests that while users may be aware of the harm inherent in their comments, anonymity provides a safe platform for them to express them (Herring et al. 2002). Such a process allows for what Zimbardo (1969) has termed 'a deindividuated state,' whereby the feelings of guilt, shame, and fear are weakened.

In an attempt to reduce the presence of hate speech on Reddit, there are regulations that manage the content that is shared on this website. Although no longer in use, moderators of Subreddits were able to 'shadow' ban individuals, meaning that while they were still able to comment on threads, these would be hidden from other users. Recently, this has been replaced in favour of account suspensions which inform the user of their temporary ban. These attempts to manage content are examples of the Terms of Service (TOS) that all internet page providers will have. Yet, the management of these TOS's are complicated on Reddit, as the responsibility to remove comments and ban users is awarded to the moderator of individual Subreddits. Thus, while regulations are in place, they lack consistency across the whole site. More recently, the site went beyond moderator control to remove five Subreddits which were seen to harass individuals. The overall response on Reddit was anger, with some users warning 'be careful talking about fat people. Entire subreddits have been blocked' (Reddit 2015b) and 'EVERYTHING IS BANNED NOTHING IS SAFE' (Reddit 2015b). Appealing to the free speech debate, one user notes 'surely, Reddit, a pioneer of free speech will provide us an outlet for our angst' (Reddit 2015b). Such a comment draws upon the non-consequentialist justification of free speech which pertains to the right of citizens to engage with political debates and government decisions (Sorial 2015). From this perspective, the expression of hate speech in the context of this research may be justified on the basis that it is of importance to political debates concerning the reduction of welfare expenditure.

For some authors, constraints to free speech are detrimental to human rights. Notably taken up by Tammy Bruce (2001), such a perspective argues that hate speech laws demonstrate 'the actual criminalization of the most private, personal, and subjective part of our lives- what we think'. Critical of the constraints upon speech that political correctness imposes, Bruce argues that 'opinions in and of themselves are not harmful' and should not, therefore be supressed (Bruce 2001, xiii). Any regression of this right, according to Kiska (2012, 112), 'shut[s] down debate and create[s] a heckler's veto. In the end, a chilling effect is created that leads to self-censorship and an overtly sensitive society'. In a bid to justify their decision to ban the five Subreddits, Reddit argued that they were 'banning behaviour, not ideas', recognising the difficulty in managing the tension between the right to free speech and protection against harm (Reddit 2015c).

The removal of five Subreddits does demonstrate a growing commitment on Reddit to manage the interactions on their site, however, there remains a significant lack of unity in first uncovering and subsequently penalising hate speech due to the restrictions to uphend the right of free speech. Indeed, the difficulties that Reddit faces in tackling the conflict between hate speech and free speech is a discussion that has significance beyond this site alone, demonstrated quite recently in the Charlottesville demonstrations. The demonstrations brought together 'a coalition of old and new white supremacist groups connected by social media' (Fausset and Feuer 2017). That is, the online space that allows for hateful propaganda to be shared and distributed was brought outside of this platform, and to the offline world. As a result, there has been newfound scrutiny among platforms and service provides to confront the use of the online domain as a site for hate groups to communicate (Brandom 2017). Despite the violence that occurred as a result of these online communications, there remains a commitment to freedom of expression, with organisations such as Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) arguing that the internet, as an online infrastructure, must remain neutral (Brandom 2017). Blocking certain content, then, is suggested to represent an infringement upon this, and to the rights of free speech.

It is of course, imperative that freedom of expression is respected. However, the justification of hate speech under this right is a detrimental barrier to establishing human rights for all. Indeed, as Cornwell and Orbe (1999, 79) suggest, 'hate speech- situated within the cloak of free speech- has been used by those traditionally in power'. Thus, free speech may be understood as a 'political prize' (Fish 1994), a 'right' that is made available to the privileged

majority in order to validate strict social divisions between 'us' and 'them.' To this end, free speech and anonymity may be seen as privileges that are afforded to those who adhere to ableist standards, and express the dominant narrative. In austere times, this privilege is shown to have been taken up by so-called 'hardworking taxpayers' in order to mark out the dependent 'Other' figure of disability, and dispose of it to the dustbin of ableism.

## Concluding Thoughts

This analysis has revealed a wealth of disablist hate speech that exists on the online bulletin board, Reddit. Contextualised within the wider context of austerity, hate speech is suggested to be part of a process of self-validation, which transgresses to the explicit dehumanisation of others. Disablist hate speech, in this way, functions to preserve ableist relations in a climate of austerity, by driving up the ontological security of the 'hardworking taxpayer,' and simultaneously branding disabled people with scars of austerity. As discussed, these relations are particularly charged in austere times, as the requirement for so-called 'hardworking taxpayers' underpinned by vicious attacks on the welfare state 'make us all vulnerable' (Bates, Goodley, and Runswick-Cole 2017). It is this sense of vulnerability that manifests itself within Hevey's 'dustbins for disavowal' and provides a justified space for disablist hate speech to emerge. The current socio-economic climate and political response to this are thus fundamental agents in the development and normalisation of disablist discourses, and to the creation of an inherently negative metanarrative that renders disability as an unnecessary and burdensome cost. As Williams and Bendelow (1998, 47) explains, 'deviance is necessary for the symbolic (re)affirmation of collective sentiments and the ritual (re)enforcement of moral boundaries.' That is, the disablist hate speech is justified and socialised by a climate of austerity, to which ableism has rendered disability as the antithesis of what is considered human (Goodley and Runswick-Cole 2016).

By forcing disabled people to the peripheries of society as an inferior Other, disablist hate speech reduces disability 'in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one' (Goffman 1963, 12) that is subject to take on the anxieties and fears that non-disabled people wish to dispose of. While it has been outlined that these hierarchical relations have existed throughout history, it is shown that the navigation of emotions bound to the context of austerity serves to justify disablist hate, not just on the basis of perceived difference but that of disgust and resentment (Hughes 2015). As Tsesis (2002, 88) explains, '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 violation of these norms is given a space on the internet, whereby the facilities of anonymity and immediacy serve to protect the right to free speech whilst demonstrating explicit harms for the proliferation of hate speech.

The facilities of the online domain provide an opportunity for people to interact across the globe with few barriers. These findings suggest that this opportunity has been manipulated to bolster a relatively protected platform for the proliferation of hate against certain groups. The internet presents an opportunity to communicate anonymously which, as suggested, may allow the online space to become a platform for the expression of hate speech. In addition, the debates concerning free speech and hate speech have been reignited in light of online technologies, as the practical difficulty in regulating online communications fosters the demand for decreasing censorship. What is needed, therefore, is more research focused not just on evidencing the existence of online hate speech, but research that works towards practical solutions.

Equally important, however, is that future developments involve disabled people, and are thus grounded upon knowledge that is experientially rich. Indeed, many disabled people actively participate and engage with online communities. According to Bowker and Tuffin (2002; 2004; 2007), online communities are an important means of communication for disabled people due to its removal from the conventions and confinements of offline reality. As Huffaker, and Calvert (2005) suggest, the internet is a space whereby 'the power of the gaze becomes displaced by a textually oriented medium' (Bowker & Tuffin 2002, p.340), affording disabled people agency over important aspects of identity construction (Guo, Bricout, and Huang 2005; Stamou, Alevriadou, and Soufla 2016; Williamson et al. 2001). Research by Kang, Brown, and Kiesler (2013) also presents anonymity as a tool for individuals to manage their online social relationships, particularly if they found this difficult offline, while for others, anonymity is sought to preserve their offline relationships by keeping their online persona separate from their constructed offline image (Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimons 2002). Such an approach not only enhances the relevance of the solutions suggested, but provides a means of resistance for disabled people. There is a space, then, for the internet to be utilised by different actors involved in tackling online hate by utilising those facilities that provide a platform for hate, as tools of engagement, communication, and resistance. Future research should consider the possibility for resistance through online communications, to enable not only a recognition of the problem,

but also an understanding of the experience of online disablist hate speech, both in terms of receiving and resisting this type of communication. Such research will require a multidisciplinary approach that brings together disabled people, academics, policy-makers, organisations, and online website administrators.

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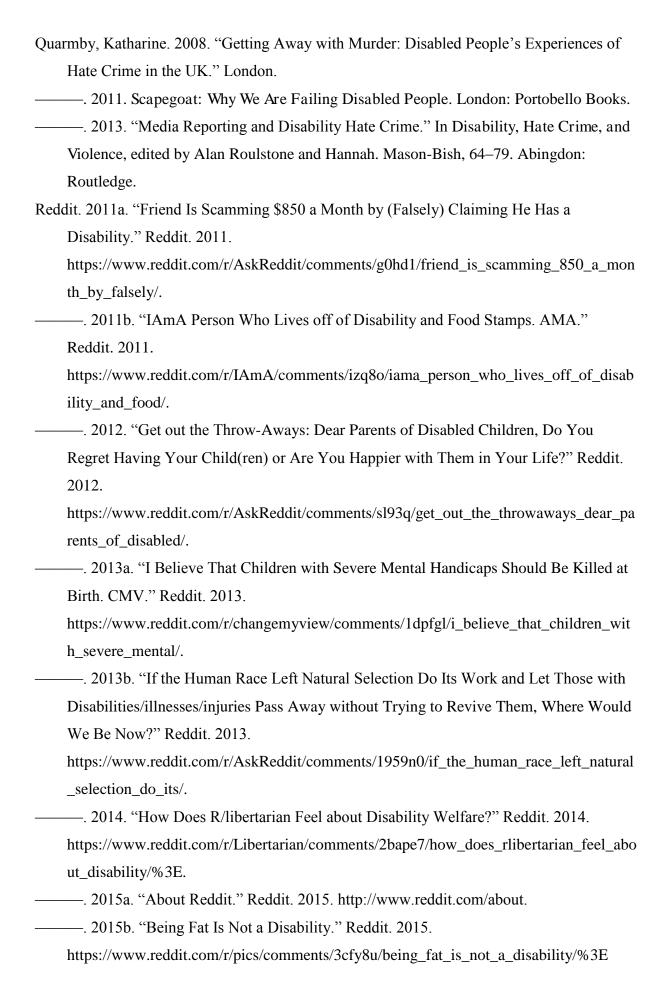
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