"Vulnerable, Victimized, and Objectified": Understanding Ableist Hate and Harassment Experienced by Disabled Content Creators on Social Media

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ABSTRACT

Content creators (e.g., gamers, activists, vloggers) with marginalized identities are at-risk of experiencing hate and harassment. This paper examines the ableist hate and harassment that disabled content creators experience on social media. Through surveys (N=50) and interviews (N=20) with disabled creators, we developed a taxonomy of 11 types of ableist hate and harassment (e.g., eugenics-related speech, denial and stigmatization of accessibility) and outlined how ableism harms creators' well-being and content creation practices. Using statistical modeling, we investigated differences in ableist experiences given creators' intersecting identities such as race and sexuality. We found that LGBTQ disabled creators face significantly more ableist hate compared to non-LGBTQ disabled creators. Lastly, we discuss our findings through an infrastructure lens to highlight how disabled creators experience platform-enabled ableism, undergo labor to cope with hate, and develop strategies to safeguard against future hate.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Social and professional topics → People with disabilities**;
• **Human-centered computing → Empirical studies in HCI**;
Social media; **Accessibility**.

KEYWORDS

ableism, hate and harassment, social media, content creators, privacy, intersectionality, disability discrimination, infrastructure lens

Content Warning: This paper shares detailed anecdotes of ableist hate & harassment, including explicit and offensive ableist language and references to self-harm, suicide, and death.

1 INTRODUCTION

In 2019, TikTok admitted to a leaked rulebook extract guiding moderators to suppress the content of "disabled people, people with facial disfigurements, Down's syndrome, and autism" [7]. TikTok purportedly made this decision to protect disabled people, who they viewed as more "susceptible to bullying or harassment" [1, 7]. While TikTok has apologized and lifted such policies, this incident uncovered not only the severity of hate and harassment towards disabled creators by other users but also how band-aid solutions such as video suppression can further exclude disabled creators from meaningfully participating on the platform. As the content creator economy grows exponentially [11, 44, 81], it is especially crucial to understand how disabled content creators experience ableist[1] hate and harassment and develop appropriate platform solutions to mitigate such harm.

Content creators produce content distributed on social media to express themselves, share their hobbies, connect with others, and educate the public [41]. Prior work has shared the unique ways in which disabled content creators use social media, such as advocating for disability rights [61] and creating playful content to debunk disability stereotypes [23]. While digital content creation is a creative outlet for self-expression, disabled content creators face challenges due to the inaccessibility of social media platforms [47, 50, 65] and disability-related hate [32, 57, 61]. Similar to other creators with marginalized identities, disabled creators are at a high risk of experiencing online hate and harassment.

A growing body of HCI scholarship has examined hate and harassment on social media platforms; however, little is known about the types of ableist hate and harassment that disabled content creators experience online. Recent work from Heung et al. [32] identified ableist microaggressions targeted at disabled social media users, and Sannon et al. [61] documented disability-related harassment faced by disability activists. These findings beget additional questions: what are the varying ways in which ableist hate manifests, what are the differences in ableist experiences given

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[1] *Ableist* is the adjective form of the noun *ableism*, used to describe discrimination and prejudice towards disabled people [22]

a creator's intersecting identities, and how do disabled content creators cope with such experiences?

We build on prior work by centering disabled content creators' experiences with ableist hate and harassment on social media. To holistically understand varying forms of ableist hate, we recruited different types of creators with diverse disabilities and intersecting marginalized identities. More specifically, we ask the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** What types of ableist hate, harassment, and discrimination do disabled content creators face online?
- **RQ2:** What social identities (i.e., race, gender, sexuality) lead to higher risk of ableist hate and harassment?
- **RQ3:** How do disabled content creators cope with the ableism they face online?

We conducted a two part, mixed-methods study with 50 disabled content creators. First, we distributed a survey to capture the different types of hate and harassment disabled creators face and the frequency with which they experience hate and harassment. From the survey responses, we examined the relationship between a creator's identity (non-male / male, non-white / white, LGBTQ / non-LGBTQ) and the amount of ableist hate they receive as rated on a Likert scale (never, rarely, sometimes, always, often). We ran two descriptive models: (1) linear regression to investigate significant differences in the amount of ableist hate experienced and (2) logistic regression to examine the likelihood of experiencing a disproportionate amount of ableist hate (defined as receiving hate "often" or "always"). Our statistical models found that LGBTQ disabled content creators experience significantly more ableist hate and harassment compared to non-LGBTQ disabled creators, and that LGBTQ creators are predicted to experience a disproportionate amount of ableist hate and harassment.

We then interviewed 20 of our survey respondents, asking for more details around their content creation practices and ableist experiences. Using both survey and interview data, we identified new and unique experiences of ableist hate and harassment, such as eugenics-related hate speech, and uncovered new severe instances of known types of ableist hate such as using misinformation to invalidate a creator's disability. We also captured the experiences of disabled creators with platform moderation and found that platforms not only wrongfully censored disability-related content, but also took no action on content that disabled creators reported as containing ableist hate. We surfaced unique strategies practiced by disabled creators to mitigate ableist hate, such as limiting ways in which they disclose their disability. In summary, our paper makes three primary contributions:

(1) We develop a taxonomy of 11 types of ableist hate and harassment.
(2) We model how intersecting identities shape the amount of ableist hate and harassment received, finding that LGBTQ disabled creators experience significantly more ableist hate and are predicted to experience a disproportionate amount of ableist hate compared to non-LGBTQ creators.
(3) Using an infrastructure lens, we discuss how ableism is exacerbated by platforms and moderation processes, causing emotional harm and additional labor for disabled creators to cope and remain safe from ableist hate.

2 RELATED WORK

We situate our work within literature on content creation and online hate and harassment.

2.1 Content Creation

Content creation, also known as the creator economy [11, 44], is growing exponentially, with an estimated 50 million content creators around the world [81]. HCI research has begun to explore content creation niches, such as food influencers [79] and adult content creators [72]. Other work has highlighted the precarity of the creator gig economy [20]. Content creators have expressed frustration with their accounts being shadowbanned, meaning that the creator's content is not visible to other users despite being still visible to the creator [19, 20, 55]. Additionally, prior research has documented challenges with creators' content being suppressed with fewer views [10, 39] or censored and removed altogether [29]. These challenges disproportionately affect historically marginalized creators. For example, Haimson et al. [29] found disproportionate censorship amongst transgender and Black social media users expressing their identities, despite following community guidelines. Similarly, Kingsley et al. [39] discovered that content related to LGBTQ-related keywords was often suppressed and demonetized, and postulated that disability-related keywords would be demonetized as well.

Disabled Content Creators. Disabled content creators use social media to educate others about disability [1, 12, 23, 25, 64], provide emotional and informational peer support between disabled people [24, 25, 36, 50, 60, 62, 64], share hobbies and stream games [23, 36, 57, 64], and advocate for disability rights and accessibility accommodations [26, 43, 61].

For example, Seo et al. [64] found that blind and low vision vloggers used social media to "facilitate social and peer support" and educate others about vision loss, while also achieving personal goals like monetizing their content and getting out of their comfort zone. Another study scraped TikTok videos to understand the types of playful content disabled creators produced [23]. The researchers categorized TikTok videos by themes such as debunking myths and stereotypes and sharing perks of their disability. Other researchers found that disabled creators produced content related to disability awareness to counter false narratives surrounding the disability community [12] and to build strong communities and relationships [49, 50].

Distinct from general content creators' experiences, disabled content creators face specific challenges regarding platform inaccessibility [47, 50, 65]. Prior research has found that disabled creators require extra effort and access labor to have the same opportunities to create and share their work and to ensure accessibility to others (e.g., adding captions) [8, 26, 58, 65]. Furthermore, the inaccessibility of social media features was perceived to disadvantage disabled content creators. For example, Rong et al. [58] found that the inaccessibility of live stream features, such as the lack of support for engaging with on-screen comments, reduced the creator's engagement with their audience.

Prior work has also documented instances of algorithmic suppression or censorship targeted towards disabled content creators [12, 55, 58]. Some studies found social media users and content

creators to perceive platforms as amplifying able-bodied content and suppressing disability-related content [38, 58]. Further, Choi et al. [12] detailed instances of YouTube's moderation algorithm filtering disability-related content without explanation, such as automatically replacing a thumbnail photo containing an image of a prosthetic leg. Our empirical study adds additional evidence of challenges disabled content creators face due to online harassment and platform moderation.

2.2 Online Hate & Harassment

Online hate and harassment is a growing concern within the HCI community, especially towards people with historically marginalized identities or those with high visibility and influence.

Prior work has examined the experiences of social media users who are at risk of hate and harassment, including professors and journalists [18, 27], women [33, 67, 72, 73, 76], LGBTQ people [5, 30, 42, 52, 72], Asian people [46], and Black people [30, 51]. Historically marginalized social media users may be more likely to experience online hate and harassment. For example, LGBTQ and / or Black Twitch streamers were disproportionately targeted with hate raid messages rooted in anti-Black racism and antisemitism [30]. Furthermore, LGBTQ+ social media users in Bangladesh received harassment that forced users to adopt pseudonyms to hide their identities [52].

Content creators are at a heightened risk of experiencing hate and harassment because of their high visibility and publicly viewable accounts. Thomas et al. [70] surveyed US-based content creators' experiences with online hate and harassment, finding that gender and audience size correlated with a higher risk for hate and harassment. They captured perceptions of using platform moderation tools and coping strategies, such as reaching out to other content creators. Samermit et al. [59] interviewed content creators to understand their protective practices for mitigating hate and harassment to ensure emotional, physical, relational, and financial safety. The researchers identified additional coping strategies, such as setting up keywords to automatically filter toxic content.

Current flaws in platform moderation have led social media users to self-censor, reduce time on social media, or leave platforms altogether [59, 70]. While community guidelines are meant to establish normative behaviors, prior work found community guidelines across platforms to be inconsistent and vague with regards to definitions of harassment and bullying [2, 54]. Additionally, given the sheer amount of content, reporting and flagging is a common tool for bystanders to report harassment and abuse [21], allowing social media users to "participate or appear to" in governance [13]. However, when content reported by users was not deemed to violate community guidelines, this invalidated the harassment experience and increased overall frustration [2, 4]. Reporting can also be inappropriately used – prior research has documented usage of false reporting to censor content [13] or disadvantage players in online games [40].

Ableist Hate and Harassment. While prior work has documented ableist microaggressions [32], little work has been done to understand the overt forms of ableist hate and harassment that disabled people experience. Ringland [57] studied the experiences of autistic youth on Minecraft, finding that the "Autcraft" community

was both a safe virtual space to reaffirm users' disability identities while also increasing their risk of receiving violent hate. Ringland's work documented several instances of hate, where perpetrators framed autism in a derogatory way and suggested self-harm. Such violent hate that targets disability identity causes emotional harm and exacerbates existing mental health conditions [36, 57].

One study in particular uncovered overt forms of hate and harassment targeted at disability activists. Sannon et al. [61] conducted an interview study with disability activists to understand how they navigated visibility online, and found that disability activists experienced three types of harassment in response to their advocacy work: (1) invalidating, ignorant, and hateful messages about disability, (2) sexual harassment and fetishization of disability, and (3) technical or coordinated attacks. They also documented how disability activists respond to or mitigate hate, often in tension with their goals as activists. We extend Sannon et al.'s work by surfacing new types of ableist hate and harassment, such as eugenics-related hate.

These studies provide necessary grounding for examining ableist hate and harassment targeted at disabled content creators. What remains unknown is how other aspects of disabled creators' identities intersect to produce oppressive conditions. Intersectionality is the concept that individuals are shaped by multiple social identities, which can result in unique forms of discrimination and harassment [14, 15]. Warford et al. [78] provided a framework for understanding users who are at risk of digital safety concerns because of who they are, including those with historically marginalized identities (e.g. women, LGBTQ people, marginalized racial groups who are non-white). Having a disability and also identifying as having another historically marginalized identity can also influence people's experiences with privacy, security, and safety threats, and may lead to a greater risk of experiencing ableism online. Intersectionality provides a lens for understanding the nuances of ableist hate and harassment that are reflective of structural oppression more generally. In our study, we share differences in experiences of ableist hate and harassment given creators' intersectional identities.

3 METHODS

We conducted a two-part study with (1) a survey of 50 content creators with various disabilities and (2) follow-up interviews with 20 of our survey respondents.

3.1 Participant Recruitment & Demographics

We recruited participants through social media posts and targeted outreach. Each participant was required to self-identify as being a content creator with a public social media account where they had disclosed their disability (via their posts, videos, bio, etc.), post multiple times per year, be above the age of 18, and feel comfortable communicating in English or ASL. Similar to prior research [6, 37], we used keyword and hashtag searches with disability-related terms (e.g., "blind", "wheelchair") on various social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Instagram) to identify potential participants. We expanded our recruitment search through follow lists and snowball sampling. Interested content creators completed a 3-minute survey to assess eligibility. We recruited a diverse set of content creators, including accessibility advocates, disability activists, athletes, gamers, and

vloggers. All recruited content creators were located in the US, Canada, or Europe. Table 1 shows aggregated participant demographics and information about their digital profiles.

3.2 Survey and Interviews

Participants were emailed a consent form and a 15-minute Qualtrics survey designed to capture their creator background, demographics, experiences with hate and harassment, and coping practices. To rate how often they experienced hate and harassment because of their disability, participants chose from a 5-point Likert scale from never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always. Survey participants were compensated with a $10 gift card and were asked to participate in a follow-up interview.

We conducted 60-minute, semi-structured interviews with 20 participants. Each interview participant was sent the consent form in advance. To mitigate recall bias, participants were asked to reflect on ableist experiences before the interview and, if possible, to show screenshots of ableist instances as an objective artifact to refer to. Three participants were d/Deaf or hard of hearing, and the ASL interpreters present in their interview also consented to participating. Interview participants were compensated with a $25 gift card and ASL interpreters were paid for their time. Each interview had three sections:

- **Content Creator Background.** We asked questions regarding social media use, motivations for being a content creator, and content creation practices.
- **Hate, Harassment, and Discriminatory Experiences.** We asked about a time when the creator had experienced ableist hate, harassment, or discrimination, asking follow-up questions to better understand what happened.
- **Reflection on Impact and Platform Design.** We asked about the impact of ableism and how they imagined platforms could better support them during such experiences.

3.3 Quantitative Analysis

To assess the relationship between intersectional identities (i.e., race, gender, and sexuality) and the frequency of ableist hate and harassment, we ran two descriptive models using R: a linear regression and a logistic regression. The linear regression model investigated significant intersectional predictors of the quantity of hate, while the logistic regression model examined the likelihood of encountering a disproportionate amount of hate. We removed data from two participants who preferred not to disclose one of the predictor variables, resulting in a sample size of 48.

Similar to Thomas et al.'s model [70], each model controlled for the number of followers and included three predictor variables:

(1) **Race (non-white and white):** We coded self-described race into white (e.g., White British) and nonwhite (e.g., Black, Latino, Asian). As shown in prior work, non-white racial minorities are more at-risk of online discrimination [30, 46, 51, 78] and may be at a higher risk of ableism as well.

(2) **Gender (non-male and male):** Non-male included those who identified as being non-binary, women, or preferred to self describe. All who self-described wrote variations of being non-binary. Non-male people are more at-risk of online discrimination [33, 42, 78] and may be more at-risk of ableism.

(3) **LGBTQ (LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ):** LGBTQ included those who identified as being LGBQ and / or transgender. Prior work has indicated that LGBTQ people are at-risk of online discrimination [5, 30, 42, 52, 72, 78] and may also face higher risk of receiving ableist hate.

The dependent variable was how often participants experience hate and harassment because of their disability. For the linear regression model, the frequency of ableist hate and harassment was treated as an ordinal scale (never = 0, rarely = 1, sometimes = 2, often = 3, always = 4). For the logistic regression model, we binarized the dependent variable to 0 = never, rarely, and sometimes and 1 = often and always. We defined disproportionate as "often" and "always," as hate and harassment is commonly experienced by content creators at least once in their career [70]. We tested basic model assumptions, including normality in the linear regression (via histogram and QQplot) and a variance inflation test in the logistic regression, confirming there was no correlation between the predictor variables (all GVIF scores were under 1.3).

3.4 Qualitative Analysis

The interviews and open-ended survey responses were coded by two authors. For the first four interviews, the authors coded separately, met up to compare codes, and developed a codebook. This process allowed for discussions of agreements and disagreements that were beneficial during thematic analysis [48]. Once the codebook was stabilized (less than 10% of total codes were added), the authors coded separately while annotating and discussing discrepancies in the codebook. Once all of the interviews were coded, the same codebook was used to analyze the survey responses. One researcher conducted thematic analysis [9] and received iterative feedback from all the authors. We had 28 parent codes (e.g., ableism) and 541 codes (e.g., ableism: unfit for parenting), which we grouped into themes (e.g., disability as inability).

3.5 Ethical Considerations and Researchers' Positionality

Given the sensitive nature of this topic, we approached the interviews with care. We reiterated that participants could take breaks or discontinue the interview anytime without penalty. After each interview, we allowed time for the participant to decompress with the interviewer and ask any questions "off the record." Recognizing the risks associated with public online profiles, in this paper we safeguard participants' anonymity by sharing aggregated demographic information and omitting details pertaining to their personal accounts or distinct posts when sharing our findings.

All authors have a range of experiences related to disability, including lived experiences with a disability and prior experience conducting research with and for the disability community. Some authors have first-hand experience with online hate and harassment. Our approach is to amplify the perspectives of disabled people regarding what they perceive as ableist hate. We recognize that ableism is systemic and not solely a technological issue. By sharing

Table 1: Participant Demographics & Digital Information

Identity Demographics		
Age	18-24 = 12 25-34 = 19	35-44 = 14 45-54 = 5
Gender	M = 16 W = 25	Non-binary = 5 Prefer to self-describe = 4
Transgender	No = 43 Yes = 6	Prefer not to say = 1
Sexuality	Heterosexual = 18 LGBQ = 24	Prefer not to say = 6 Prefer to self-describe = 2
Race	Non-white = 16 White = 32	Prefer not to say = 2
Disability	Attention deficit = 8 Autism = 13 Blind or low vision = 10 Chronic illness = 3 d/Deaf or hard of hearing = 9 Health-related disability = 24	Mobility disability = 8 Permanent / long-term disability = 30 Psychological / psychiatric = 4 Situational disability = 4 Speech-related disability = 4
Digital Profile		
Platform	Discord = 23 Podcast = 1 Facebook = 31 Reddit = 5 Fruitlab = 1 Snapchat = 9 Instagram = 43 Steam = 1 Ko-Fi = 2	TikTok = 22 LinkedIn = 6 Twitch = 18 Medium = 1 Twitter = 36 Moj = 1 YouTube = 25 Pinterest = 4
Followers	Less than 10,000 = 28 10,001-50,000 = 15	50,001-100,000 = 6 100,001-500,000 = 1
Experience	Under 1 year = 2 1-2 years = 7	3-5 years = 21 6 or more years = 20
Content	Art = 6 Identity-related = 17 Beauty / fashion = 9 Lifestyle = 12 Business = 1 Mental health = 1 Comedy = 7 Music = 6 Travel = 4 Gaming = 15	Disability-related = 46 News = 1 DIY = 3 Social issues = 25 Education = 22 Sport = 1 Entertainment = 13 Tech = 7 Food = 2 Vlogs / video diaries = 7

social media experiences, we shed light on the prevailing ableism today.

4 FINDINGS

We present participants' ableist experiences on social media, including types of hate and harassment and how platforms discriminated against disabled creators by suppressing disability-related content (Section 4.1). We then consider how participants' intersectional identity(s) led to different manifestations and amounts of ableist hate (Section 4.2). Finally, we share the aftermath of such ableist experiences, including harms, participants' immediate responses, and coping strategies to mitigate hate in the future (Section 4.3). Throughout our findings, we differentiate if the data came from the surveys (S#) or the interviews (P#).

4.1 Ableist Hate, Harassment, and Discriminatory Experiences

Ableist hate and harassment was common across all participants: 96% of participants reported experiencing hate and harassment because of their disability. We organized ableist experiences into different types varying in severity and topic. Each type presented below is not mutually exclusive; one instance of ableist hate oftentimes encompassed multiple types.

4.1.1 Slurs & Derogatory Language. The most explicit form of ableist hate speech was short slurs used to demean and belittle creators. Participants were name-called as the *"r-word"* (most commonly shared), *"crippled,"* and *"handicapped"* either in response to general disagreements online or controversial topics. They also received unprompted attacks solely for disclosing their disability. For example, P27 is a disability activist who is *"the first person to… call out problematic issues"* online, which she acknowledged can lead to more ableism. She recalled posting an article calling out the "inspiration porn trope" and receiving pitying responses, including: how she is an *"angry, bitter cripple,"* why can't she *"just be happy for other people,"* and *"what a sad life [she] must lead!"* Similarly, another disability activist, P49, recalled receiving varying ableist slurs through direct messages and quote tweets. P49 expanded on the impact of experiencing hate:

> *"They were calling me crippled… saying the r-word… They were saying that maybe if I was vegan, maybe I wouldn't be disabled… and it really bothered me because I've been bullied most of my life [for] being a disabled woman… Some even said I should die sadly. It really just triggered me."* (P49)

Ableist slurs were commonly paired with other forms of harassment tactics like false reporting. For example, P1 started a TikTok live stream responding to hate over a video she posted. Five users joined the stream and started *"[calling her] all the slurs and mass reported [her] and shut down [her] live stream."* TikTok did not restore her ability to livestream until almost 2 years later.

Some harassers manipulated the term disability to be an insult to further exclude disabled people and stigmatize disability. For example, S4 *"made a post about COVID-19 precautions during the holidays"* and received a comment saying she was *"clearly mentally ill and no one should want to be around her."* P4's harasser labeled her with a disability she does not identify with and used disability in a derogatory way to socially exclude her. Harassers also used disability as an insult toward other social identities, as discussed in Section 4.2.

4.1.2 Death Threats, Suicide, and Self-Harm. Several participants recalled violent and graphic comments threatening physical harm and encouraging self-harm and suicide. A few participants received *"straight up death threats"* from harassers, such as *"I'll shoot you in the head"* (P26). P1, a disability activist, shared an extensive story of a viral video gone wrong. She posted a TikTok educating her viewers about an ableist and offensive slur. At the time, she did not have many followers and the video unexpectedly went viral, causing her to receive a flood of death threats. Harassers stalked P1's family members, messaging them *"tell your sister that if she ever comes to Britain I'm going to kill her"* and *"clearly you didn't*

raise your daughter well enough, because… she gets offended over words." P1 detailed the unexpected violent threats:

> *"I got people in my DMs threatening to kill me… I had people who found my old address, and they thought that was my current address, and they were like, 'I'm gonna send a bomb…' I had people…attacking my sister on social media… I had people finding my mom on social media and sending death threats to her… it was just over this literally 60 second video of me being like, here's a word, this is why it's offensive, here's the history behind it, [and] please don't say it."*

P1 was also tagged in threatening videos of *"one guy showing all of his weapons"* and what he would use if he saw her in real life. Even though that video went viral years ago, P1 still gets occasional hateful comments at present.

Other harassers wrote graphic comments encouraging creators to commit physical harm to themselves (i.e., self-harm and suicide). P30 detailed *"near-contact harassment on Twitter"* after sharing a wheelchair-accessible tabletop game he created: *"individuals were upset about the 'woke' decisions… and thought that disabled characters didn't belong in adventures. I was told that I should kill myself"* (P30). P37 received a comment to self-harm after tweeting about the importance of video game accessibility: a harasser commented with a picture of a cartoon chewing off his fingers and wrote *"bite off your fingers."* By telling P37 to self-harm his fingers, this also indicated that the harasser wished to further deny P37 access to games. P37 responded to the harasser, in an attempt to clarify if it was a threat or if the harasser was telling him to hurt himself, so he could report it properly.

While some suggestions of self-harm were explicit, P46 shared a subtle experience. After posting an Instagram reel of her service dog, she received comments implying that she should hurt herself such as *"there is a market for razors and ropes."* P46 acknowledged that the implicit comment subverted platform moderation.

4.1.3 Violent & Dehumanizing Speech. While some graphic forms of hate speech were explicit threats of physical harm, other violent speech included dehumanizing comments saying that disabled people *"deserve to die"* (P35) and *"never should have been born"* (P27, P35). Violent speech was prompted by topics related to accessibility, disability advocacy, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Disabled gamers received violent comments while creating and advocating for accessibility. For example, P37, a game developer, gamer, and accessibility activist, inquired about the accessibility features of a specific game on Twitter. A fan of the game complained about a feature that P37 noted was crucial for accessibility. The fan responded *"using abusive language, telling [him] that… all people with disabilities were defective, a waste of air and wishing that [they] were all dead"* (P37).

Disability activists also experienced violent speech in response to their online advocacy work. For example, P42 and her friend were profiled by a media company and asked to post about accessibility during pride month. While the goal of the post was to make disabled people feel more welcome in the LGBTQ community, P42 received multiple forms of hate. The comments ranged from excluding P42 (e.g., *"what right do they have to be a part of this LGBTQ community?"*), explicit questioning of P42's date-ability (e.g., *"who*

would date them?"), and dehumanizing disabled people (e.g., *"people like that should basically go die"*). For P9, the hate she received was from other activists: *"climate activists and vegans… don't understand the needs of disabled people and can get very violent… For instance, I need a plastic straw due to my disability and… people have literally told me that maybe it's better if disabled people die"* (P9).

While some violent remarks occurred in response to certain topics, participants noticed that violent speech overall spiked during the pandemic. A few pandemic-related comments were less explicit, such as *"stay home forever"* and *"I'll try to find where you are and cough into your mailbox"* (P26). In another example, P9 detailed the non-stop hate they received during the pandemic due to advocating for masks and vaccines: it was *"a constant… stream based on how I look, that I'm disabled, that I am unworthy of life, that I would be better that I die, [and that] disabled people are selfish because they want to be protected."* Many participants also shared how violent hate increased after Elon Musk acquired Twitter, leading to lower engagement online and increased concern regarding Twitter's safety for the disability community.

4.1.4 Eugenics-Related Speech. A subset of violent remarks specifically referred to eugenics. P27 called it the *"eugenics-type comment,"* which carried a connotation of disabled people being unworthy of life. P42 identified this type of hate as *"World War II Nazi rhetoric."* For example, P9 recalled harassers referencing Nazi eugenics: *"people think my life is just suffering, so it would be 'better if disabled people died [because] disabled people set us back' [and]… 'we should bring back gas chambers for disabled people'"* (P9).

Eugenics-related comments mentioned genetics or used biological terms, such as *"disabled people should be aborted"* (P30) or *"it's survival of the fittest"* (P3). In one instance, P37 tweeted about a problematic article that shamed those who use accessibility features of an online game. One user disagreed with P37, saying that their interaction was just *"friendly banter"* and *"not insensitive."* After P37 attempted to explain how the article was ableist, that same user started insulting P37's brain, genes, ability, and denied him from playing games. P37 detailed the escalated interaction:

> *"The person [told] me… if you had such a shit brain you shouldn't be playing the game. I told him, 'why is my brain shit?' … He was like, 'because you have cerebral palsy…your brain doesn't work right.' And I told him, 'First, I don't have cerebral palsy… and if you want I can explain to you how [my disability] is different…' [his] response was, 'Oh, my bad for not understanding… you don't have shit brain, you have shit genes in your family.'"*

A few disability activists faced hateful comments when advocating against modern-day eugenics. P26 posted about a law permitting medical assistance in dying for disabled people, and was advocating against *"push[ing] disabled people into assisted suicide as [if] there are no other option[s]."* In response to her educating others about eugenic practices in hospitals, P26 received *"direct harassment"* and comments insinuating that she should kill herself. In another incident, P49 posted about how someone called child protective services to report a disabled mom, highlighting the ableism perpetuated towards disabled parents. Another disabled woman quoted the tweet and commented *"I don't feel like some disabled people*

should reproduce. I think it's very selfish."* P49 wanted to respect her opinion while also educating her that these eugenic beliefs were ableist and incorrect. Though some believe that if *"disabled people do not reproduce, then disability can disappear but the thing about disability is it will manifest itself either way"* (P49). However the conversation turned hateful and the harasser started calling P49 a bully who was trying to cancel her. This is another example of disagreements on social media escalating into hate or harassment.

4.1.5 Disability as Inability. One negative assumption behind ableist hate is that disability leads to an inability to participate in other aspects of their life. While some slurs, such as *"handicapped,"* have a similar connotation, we share longer forms of ableist hate speech that belittle and question participants' abilities. One example was a comment saying, *"you are not smart because of your physical disability"* (P49).

As a deaf parent, P15 was called *"ill-equipped"* to be a parent, accused of child abuse, and received unsolicited pity towards their child (e.g., *"poor child"*). Furthermore, harassers called P15 and their partner *"muteboxes"* and reduced sign language to *"flapping hands."* P15 also received pity directed at them with comments such as *"we are praying for you and we hope that you'll be fixed."* P15 described harassers' use of pity and hate to judge their parenting ability:

> *"[Harassers] often… spew words of judgment and hatred toward us as parents and our ability to be parents… That our child is already in a position of being set back… those words of hatred [are] mixed in with what seems to be a lot of pity for our child and for us, since they know that we couldn't control being deaf, but yet they still use that as a tool to push us down."*

While some of the hate is in response to the creator's content, a few participants recalled ability-related insults that were unexpected or unrelated to the topic at hand. P14 coined this as a *"blindness jab,"* which equated being blind with some other deficiency such as insulting his cognitive abilities. He rationalized that this jab is an easy way to *"rattle a person"* if the perpetrator does not have a good response, especially during political discourse (P14).

4.1.6 Denial & Stigmatization of Accessibility. A few participants shared hateful comments that undermined accessibility as a human right and stigmatized accessibility features. For example, gaming advocates received overt hate for asking about and promoting game accessibility. P37 received a comment about how *"people with disabilities were ruining the games"* and how accessibility features make games worse, so *"people with disabilities should all have been burned to ashes."* The violent speech in this example highlights how one comment can display multiple types of ableist hate.

Some participants were bullied for the way they played games while livestreaming. P7, an avid gamer and streamer, uses an assistive technology to play games with his mouth. A new viewer entered his live stream, saying: *"I can never [play with] somebody that plays with their mouth… if I was there I would beat your ass"* (P7's harasser). P7 recalled another similar instance while playing Call of Duty and live streaming on Facebook. His harasser said, *"you kind of suck… you shouldn't play the game if you can't play regularly."* P7 responded: *"I am able to play – maybe not at the caliber*

you want it to be… [but] just because I play with my mouth doesn't mean I shouldn't play."

4.1.7 Mocking Disability. A few participants were mocked and ridiculed for having a disability, such as *"oh you can't hear haha"* (P34). After sharing how he acquired his disability from gun violence, P7's harasser mocked him, saying *"Ha! Ha! That's what you get… [and] sucks to be you."* While P7 and P34 were mocked by one individual, P22 experienced an overwhelming number of *"ugly tweets making jokes out of his blindness"* from a popular YouTuber and their followers. Similarly, P12 experienced a coordinated attack while livestreaming and expanded on the emotional harm.

> *"A random person came into my stream and start[ed] making fun of my disability and how I look, and even had some of their friends join my stream and make fun of me as well. I had friends and people of my community try defending me and blocking the people, but one made another account to come back to my stream and continued making fun of me. I blocked that account as well. It hurt my feelings. I didn't want to livestream me playing video games anymore."* (P12)

4.1.8 Accusing of Faking Disability. Participants recalled accusations that they were faking or lying about their disability either *"for attention"* (P17, P18), *"[to] get out of accountability"* (P10), for the views and the money (P1, P17), or to perpetuate *"this trend"* of being autistic (P17). For example, P18 posted a viral Instagram Reel, but trolls repeatedly suspected the legitimacy of P18's disability. They accused him of not being blind, said he was blind for attention, and deliberately asked him questions about his disability that he had already answered.

Some harassers also impersonated other people in order to add credibility to their accusation. P1's harasser pretended to be her cousin, and stated that P1 was faking her disability, abusing her service dog, and lying about having surgeries related to her disability for the views and the money she made as a content creator. Similarly, P33's harasser created a Facebook account pretending to be his daughter because P33 had already blocked the harasser's personal account. The harasser then used the new account to comment on a public post: *"[You] say you have a disability, get a check every month… but can manage to get up and set a tent up [in a farmers market]… fake ass people"* (P33's harasser).

Harassers also used misinformation to discredit participants' disabilities in two ways. First, disabled people were accused of propagating misinformation about their conditions. When P3 shared about her *"lived experience as a disabled person… with the health system or [her] own health, [she was] told to shut up, labeled with ableist terms, and accused of lying and spreading misinformation."* Second, harassers shared medical misinformation to discount a creator's credibility. P1's harasser found articles with misinformation to support their accusation that P1 was faking their disability and consistently created new accounts to further question P1's disability. P1 explained:

> *"[The harasser] is like, 'I'm disabled, and I can tell she doesn't have the disability she says…' and they've come up with fake articles about my syndrome… [that] are not factual at all. And one of them was like, 'People with*

this syndrome die before the age of 16' … I know people in their 50s with my syndrome… And this person [says], 'See, she's supposed to be dead.'"

Furthermore, P1 had another harasser who started conspiracy theories about her. Her harasser made a video, claiming P1 was a *"liar," "not actually disabled,"* and that everything P1 did was fabricated.

The supposed controversy over creators' disabilities was discussed on other internet forums by groups such as *"Reddit fakers"* (P31). P26 found screenshots of her social media profile on Kiwi Farms, an internet forum that discusses harassment of online figures and communities. She found other users discussing the legitimacy of her disability. P26 noted that she does not know for certain if this thread led to coordinated harassment on her personal account.

4.1.9 Attacking Physical Appearance. 60% (30/50) of survey respondents received hate and harassment related to their body image. Our interview participants demonstrated how hateful comments about their body were intertwined with their disability. For example, P49 received dehumanizing and body-shaming comments from doing the Silhouette Challenge on TikTok, a challenge where people dance in front of a red light. As an ambulatory wheelchair user, P49 described why she participated in the challenge and shared more about the resultant harassment:

> *"I know with my disability I am shaped differently. But I have no shame about that, because it's not my fault. But people... pick[ed] on my disability [and] my shape, and saying that I looked like a demon, saying that I looked weird... saying that I shouldn't have done that as a disabled woman. People making ableist jokes, saying that I look like the r-word. [They were]... picking on the fact that I was disabled and I didn't look like other women who participated in the trend."*

A few other participants detailed fatphobic comments shaming their body size. One participant received body-shaming comments in social VR. P33's harasser had seen her in a virtual weight loss support group and approached her in another social space saying, *"I have an idea for you, just stop eating,"* before running away. P33 had to chase and confront her harasser in order to block them. P33 described how stigmatizing comments about her weight were forms of disability-related hate: *"despite my best efforts, it's still clear to other people that I'm in a larger body... So I do tie that in with my disability... people think that… your body is tied specifically to your actions, and that's just not necessarily true"* (P33).

4.1.10 Sexual Harassment & Fetishization. 78% (39/50) of survey respondents reported being sexually harassed. For example, S8 wrote that she had *"a person DM [her] a detailed and graphic step by step plan on how they would r*pe [her]."* S40 shared how the amount of sexual harassment and fetishization was overwhelming and harmful to their business as a content creator and to their well-being:

> *"Devotees (fetish followers of disabled people) following in the 1000s a day messaging and flooding my business account. Drowning my content and stopping it reaching its desired audience. Filling my inbox with messages.*

Commenting on all my posts. Scaring off my real followers [and] making me feel vulnerable, victimized, and objectified."

A few of our interview participants shared instances of sexual harassment and fetishization explicitly related to their disability. For instance, P49 recalled upsetting experiences with mostly men who publicly commented sexually explicit and inappropriate messages.

> *"They would say things... related to my disability about what they would do to me and they say 'Oh, I know she can't feel down there, so I can just do whatever,' and they will post it in [a] public [comment section]... This is supposed to be just a wholesome picture. Why are we going here?"* (P49)

P26 shared that most instances of sexual harassment ended up in her private inbox rather than in public comments. She explained that she had gotten messages on Facebook where the harasser pretended to have a disability, and then sent a unsolicited *"dick pic."* P26 rationalized that, since Facebook does not automatically show pictures unless you click on it, the harasser would first send disability-related clickbait (e.g., asking questions about scoliosis).

4.1.11   Suppression & Censorship of Disability Content. While a few participants mentioned their content being suppressed or their account being shadowbanned, participants mainly shared instances of wrongful censorship. Participants labeled the censorship of disability-related content as ableist and *"a form of discrimination"* (P3). For example, P1 was working on her body confidence in therapy and posted a *"swimsuit try-on haul"* video on TikTok. She shared how her video was unfairly removed from the platform:

> *"Female presenting people do this [swimsuit try-on haul] on social media all the time... [but] it got taken down because well, they were like, 'this violates guidelines' and I was like, it doesn't... because I can find 50 different videos of girls with bodies that look alike. And then you have mine, where my body does not look like everybody else and mine gets taken down."* (P1)

P42 had a similar experience on Facebook when someone reported a photo of her in a black bathing suit. She later received a message saying her post was removed because they were *"trying to keep Facebook safe."* She was confused and upset about exactly what Facebook was keeping others safe from. While it has never happened to her, P3 noticed when other disabled creators' content would get suppressed or removed, citing the double standard where non-disabled people could make a *"sexy post"* without a problem.

Participants articulated the negative impact of suppressing and censoring disability-related content as an online creator; one example was reduced engagement. A few participants discussed the energy needed to maintain engagement online, including the need for constant *"energy to record yourself"* (P3). Suppressing and censoring disability-related content depleted their already limited energy to create content, which had downstream financial implications: *"if we're not getting the views and the engagement that we deserve... [then] you are keeping us from... mak[ing] somewhat of a living off of that... [and] increasing disabled poverty rates."* (P1)

4.2   Intersectional Ableist Experiences

In this section, we examine how participants' intersectional identities influenced the types and frequency of ableist comments they experienced. We present statistical results on the relationship between race, gender, and sexuality and the amount of ableist hate and harassment participants self-reported (Table 2). Our models revealed significant results between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ groups but found no significance with regards to race or gender. Since ableist hate was often received in conjunction with LGBTQ-related and racial hate, we share how LGBTQ and racial identities intersect with ableism.

4.2.1   LGBTQ. As shown in Table 2, LGBTQ creators self-reported a significantly higher frequency of ableist hate and harassment compared to non-LGBTQ participants. When accounting for gender, race, and number of followers, our linear regression model found that LGBTQ disabled content creators received **0.735 more ableist hate and harassment** (on a frequency scale from 0-4) than those who were not LGBTQ.

In addition, LGBTQ disabled content creators were more likely to experience a disproportionate amount of ableist hate. As found by our logistic regression model, they were more likely to self-report experiencing ableist hate and harassment "often" or "always." **This logistic model predicts that LGBTQ disabled creators have an 80.7% probability of experiencing a disproportionate amount of hate compared with a 34.1% probability experienced by non-LGBTQ creators (95% CI; p < 0.01).** In summary, our models show that LGBTQ disabled content creators are at risk of experiencing more and a disproportionate amount of ableist hate and harassment compared to non-LGBTQ creators.

A few participants acknowledged that disclosing their LGBTQ and disability identities resulted in more hate in general, and that the hate typically targeted both identities. P10's podcast was *"review bombed multiple times"* with homophobic, ableist, and transphobic comments and one star ratings. P47 recalled receiving violent threats targeting their multiple identities, experiencing *"hate raids on Twitch from other creators where both the creator and their followers gave death threats to myself for being disabled and non-binary."* P26 shared an instance when the harasser referred to *"queerness [as a] second disability:"*

> *"It was [a post] on being queer and disabled, and that was getting a lot of laugh reacts and really bad comments... This comment says 'I'd offer state assisted suicide... if they use pronouns in their...bio. You're technically double handicapped. The best place for you is the bin.'"* (P26)

P31 experienced transphobic comments in response to advocating for ableism. When posting about ableist language, he would get hateful comments about his pronouns to attempt to discredit the educational nature of his post. P31 labeled this as a form of dogwhistle[2] ableism, where harassers attacked other aspects of a creator's identity on disability-related content to conceal their ableist intent. P31 explained:

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[2]Dogwhistle is the use of coded language to communicate messages and subtle signals, usually with political and discriminatory meanings [16].

Table 2: Statistical Modeling Results. Given the participants' identities, the linear and logistic regression models predict the amount of ableist hate and harassment and the likelihood of experiencing a disproportionate amount of hate. There is a significant positive effect of being an LGBTQ content creator on the amount of reported ableist hate in both models. Our models predict LGBTQ disabled content creators to experience more ableist hate and harassment than non-LGBTQ creators, and are likely to experience a disproportionate amount of ableist hate and harassment.

	Dependent variable: frequency of ableist hate and harassment (scale from 0-4)	
	Likelihood of experiencing disproportionate amount	Predicting the amount of hate
	Logistic Regression	*Linear Regression*
	(1)	(2)
Non-White	0.743	0.512
	(0.758)	(0.331)
Non-Male	−0.196	−0.204
	(0.819)	(0.361)
LGBTQ	2.090**	0.735*
	(0.797)	(0.339)
Followers	0.824	0.316
	(0.504)	(0.211)
Constant	−2.236*	1.560**
	(0.997)	(0.413)
Observations	48	48
R^2		0.171
Adjusted R^2		0.093
Log Likelihood	−26.659	
Akaike Inf. Crit.	63.318	
Residual Std. Error		1.039 (df = 43)
F Statistic		2.211* (df = 4; 43)

Note: *p<0.05;**p<0.01

"One reason why disability tweets seem to get anti-trans comments on them [is] because even the most virulently ableist people, not all of them will own up to that [being ableist]... and so finding other aspects of your identity [to attack]... [is] sort of dogwhistle ableism." (P31)

4.2.2 Race. Although our models did not find that race had a significant impact on ableist hate, P49 noticed that non-white creators seemed to experience more ableist hate than white creators. She mentioned how *"marginalized communities don't have the room to make mistakes"* and are therefore more susceptible to hate. Some also recalled experiencing racist and ableist hate simultaneously, such as a comment with both the n-word and the r-word (P34). P17 specifically received hate for her appearance, which was related to her ethnicity and disability:

"Somebody [made] fun of my face shape, which is a very African American face shape... my face shape is also often related to autism... they took screenshots of my face and were making really derogatory comments with my mom being black and like how I squeezed out of her, and it fucked up my head... and [my harassers] told me that they sent [those screenshots] to my followers. It [was] really scary." (P17)

4.3 Aftermath of Ableist Hate & Harassment

Participants shared the effects of ableist hate and harassment, including the harms incurred, their responses, and the strategies they developed to mitigate future hate.

4.3.1 Immediate Impact & Long-Term Harm. A majority of participants described the emotional impacts of receiving ableist hate

as terrible, unfair, overwhelming, frustrating, disheartening, and anxiety-inducing.

Participants shared that comments about their disability-related insecurities were especially hurtful. For example, violent comments telling P49 to *"just die"* were triggering, as she has a rare chronic illness *"that could be the cause of [her] death."* Similarly, P33 received public comments accusing her of faking her disability, which were especially hurtful because she was in the process of applying for disability status at the federal court. With an invisible[3] disability, she was already afraid of people not believing her disability experience. S11 also expanded on how faking disability accusations impacted her mental well-being:

> *"I was told that I was faking my disability for attention and taking away resources from the 'real disabled people' who needed it. This impacted my mental health making me feel low and anxious. I worried that everyone secretly thought that too. I reported it to Instagram but Instagram said that it didn't breach their policy. It makes me more worried about posting online."* (S11)

Participants expressed the long-term impacts of ableist hate on their content creation, which included limiting opportunities for their financial compensation and visibility. P17 stopped doing paid sponsorships to protect her reputation and authenticity as an autistic content creator.

> *"[Harassers said,] 'Look how many sponsored posts she does... She's just doing this to make money. She's not even really autistic...' and so I quit sponsored posts. I've had to turn down thousand dollar contracts because of it."* (P17)

4.3.2 Responding to Hate. Participants responded to ableist hate using platform moderation tools, directly responding to the harasser, and / or creating new content in response to ableism.

Using Platform Moderation Tools. Participants used a mixture of moderation tools such as deleting, blocking, and reporting to foster a *"safe space / place"* for themselves and their followers (P3, P7, P49). While deleting hateful comments was helpful for moving on from the hate and preventing it from triggering other users, deleting was burdensome and not always feasible, especially on viral posts. Blocking and reporting were commonly paired. However, it was rare for participants' reports to be addressed by platforms. While some participants hypothesized that reporting was only addressed if there was a significant number of reports from other users, they acknowledged that *"not everyone has a team of allies to help with creating a surge of reports"* (P15). A few participants who did receive a response to their report were frustrated that reporting became a *"long drawn out process."*

Reporting was commonly ineffective because platforms did not consider ableist hate and harassment as *"hateful"* (P5). Participants felt that platforms did not take reported comments seriously, and that community guidelines were not well-enforced nor informed about ableism. P49 explained that the *"guidelines are not very up to date when it comes to disability slurs,"* as they only recognized the r-word as hateful.

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[3]When disability is not immediately apparent or visible

> *"They used the word cripple, and I reported it, and then I got a report back, saying it wasn't a violation, and I thought it was kind of weird, because I'm showing they are showing hate... somebody else had tried to report someone being ableist, and they felt like it wasn't a violation... these people are not really updated on disability at all."* (P49)

P15 acknowledged that current reporting dropdown menus were limited, and P3 specifically wanted an option to report ableism. P3 voiced her frustrations with the reporting process and how the platform's silence was equivalent to saying that ableist hate was *"okay."*

> *"[It's] been awful comments, from 'Shut up, [slur]' and... being allowed to say that 'Disabled people are worthless, and should die because they are weaker' and that's okay... someone being like, 'Life is not worth living if you can't walk...' and you report that but it doesn't go against the community guidelines because they just said 'Survival of the fittest'... It doesn't count [as hate]."* (P3)

Participants also shared frustrations with being falsely mass reported. For example, TikTok blocked P1 from livestreaming because harassers mass-reported her as underage after calling her disability-related slurs. P1 explained: *"my dwarfism makes me look younger... so this is an ableism case at the end of the day. I submitted my ID to TikTok multiple times... and they refused to appeal it"* (P1). Her livestreaming function was unblocked two years later, only after a family member contacted an employee they knew at the company.

Many participants imagined a more supportive and transparent reporting process. For example, participants advocated for having an *"investigator"* representing the platform to help creators with submitting a report (P15) or an providing an explanation for why their report was not addressed (P7). P17 did not want to report content because she feared being shadowbanned. Overall, the lack of transparency of moderation tools prevented participants from using them.

Responding to the Harasser. While responding can escalate or worsen hate, some participants felt empowered to reply to their harasser to defuse the situation. For example, some wished to clarify misunderstandings or educate about disability. P33 shared an ideal situation when she had carefully written a response to a invalidating disability comment, *"attempting to educate them rather than just blocking and moving on."* As a result, the harasser deleted their original comment invalidating her disability and she has not seen any other comments from them since.

Participants' family members, friends, and followers helped respond to and educate the harasser. P15 confided in their sister to help write educational responses to ableist comments, and explained why leaving the original hate comment could be impactful for advocacy:

> *"[The response got] 400 [likes] for a comment of a comment, which is pretty impressive because that's going deeper into the posts. People have to kind of arrive there to see it, and somehow people are seeing that. I think that's really powerful... It teaches others, and it empowers others to want to become stronger allies, and*

to advocate for the disabled community ... we leave it [hateful comment] because we feel like the change can happen there." (P15)

Responding by Creating Content. Rather than directly responding to the harasser, some participants chose to respond to hate by creating new content. For example, after receiving hate on an Instagram Reel of her stim dancing, P17 reflected on what would be most hurtful towards an autistic person reading the comments. P17 created a written post about how the word *"cringe"* is harmful and ableist. After posting about her hateful experiences on the Reel, her followers went back to the original reel and left an *"onslaught of positive comments"*, which ended the harassing behavior (P17).

However, creating posts to educate about ableism also made participants susceptible to more hate. For example, P26 posted a video of her petting her service dog, but received comments such as, *"how could you disrespect a working dog?"* In response, P26 posted another video, explaining that she is allowed to pet and play with her own service dog. Despite this, she received additional hateful comments about how she is a dog abuser and forcing her dog to work.

4.3.3 Mitigating Hate. Because of their experiences with ableist hate, participants developed strategies to prevent hate from happening or mitigate the harms.

Reducing Visibility & Navigating Disability Disclosure. Some participants worked to prevent future hate by reducing the visibility of their account or their disability. For example, P9 temporarily made their account private as a way to *"step back"* from social media. While some participants reduced the overall visibility of their online profile, other participants chose to navigate how visible their disability was. Participants recognized that disclosing their disability increased their risk of ableist hate, and they made careful decisions on how exactly they disclosed their disability. For example, to protect herself from negative comments, P3 refused to post a photo of herself in a wheelchair.

Participants with an invisible disability recognized how they benefited from less ableist comments as well. P33 said, *"the great thing [about] having an invisible disability is that... people don't know that I have a disability, so when I get trolled it's usually because I am in a larger body or because I'm a girl."* However, participants with invisible disabilities were more susceptible to receiving (1) hate that invalidated their disability and (2) demands for them to prove their disability identity, which was a *"major violation of privacy"* (P42). P46, who also has an invisible disability, anticipated that she would receive this form of ableist hate and strictly only disclosed her disability status by showing her service dog.

> *"There were a couple of times when I considered [saying]... this is the disability that I have... But I think after receiving all these [ableist] comments... I was less inclined to tell people [about my] condition... I used to post a little bit more about my own [disability] experience... and now it's purely... about my dog, because I don't want to put myself [and] my own story...out there."* (P46)

A few participants were intentionally upfront about their disability to try to prevent hate. For example, P10 explained that she did not initially talk about her disability and was hesitant about sharing her disability online. However, after receiving insults about being lazy and elitist for not going to anime conventions she had helped organize in the past, P10 wanted to communicate that this was due to the inaccessibility of the convention center. Disclosing her disability with a wheelchair emoji in her username was *"a way to try to mitigate the hate and harassment"* and communicate her access needs.

Self-Censorship. Participants censored themselves for their own safety, avoiding controversial disability-related topics such as cochlear implants (P21). For disabled gamers, some opted out of reviewing controversial games or refused to review the accessibility of highly popular video games, anticipating major backlash from dedicated fans.

Anticipating backlash and ableist hate caused participants to carefully word their posts in an attempt to mitigate future hate. This effort led to participants *"overthinking"* their posts and constantly editing their content due to *"anxiety and fear of being misunderstood"* (P33). Despite writing with *"mountains of caveats"* and putting on *"Twitter rage glasses"* to filter any loopholes for hate (P10), hateful comments were sometimes inevitable. P10 shared about the pressures of being stereotyped and anticipated receiving hate if she were to talk more openly about her disability experiences.

> *"I'll have a whole one or 2 sentences [of] lead up before I share a thought because [of] not wanting to get hate and harassment just for speaking on my experience... it just has a lot more caution and anxiety to it... because I could speak on all of my frustrations being in a wheelchair... But the more blunt I am, the more backlash I'll get about it... there is this idea of the model disabled person: you're not allowed to be angry about what you experience."* (P10)

Participants developed strategies to censor themselves from reading possible hateful comments. These strategies included reducing time spent reading comments, having others read comments for them, muting comment notifications, and / or choosing to not read comments at all. A few participants removed commenting as a feature, acknowledging the trade-off of protecting their mental health over maximizing their engagement as a creator. Overall, participants developed practices to protect themselves from future hate and to avoid exposure to ableist hate.

5 DISCUSSION

Based on our findings, we present a taxonomy of online ableist hate and harassment. Using an infrastructure analytical lens [63, 68, 77], we discuss how platforms facilitate and exacerbate ableist experiences.

5.1 Taxonomy of Ableist Hate and Harassment

While our findings validated known responses to hate and coping strategies [59, 61, 70], here we focus on the varying and unique forms of ableist hate and harassment. We present a taxonomy of ableist hate and harassment that can be used as a guide to identify and mitigate ableist hate online.

Table 3 shows the 11 types of ableist hate and harassment that we organized into 5 main categories: Slurs & Derogatory Language,

Table 3: Taxonomy of Ableist Hate & Harassment

Ableist Category	Ableist Type	Examples in Findings & Prior Work	Type of Hate & Harassment [69]
Slurs & Derogatory Language	Short Slurs	You are r-word	Toxic speech, overloading, false reporting
	Using Disability as an Insult	You are double-handicapped, Ringland [57]	Toxic speech
Violent & Eugenics-Related Speech	Death Threats, Suicide, and Self-harm	I'll shoot you, Sannon et al. [61], Ringland [57]	Toxic speech, overloading, surveillance
	Violent & Dehumanizing Speech	You deserve to die	Toxic speech, overloading
	Eugenics-Related	Bring back gas chambers, you have shit genes	Toxic speech, overloading
Questioning Ability & Denying Access	Disability as Inability	You are ill-equipped, Heung et al. [32]	Toxic speech
	Denial and Stigmatization of Accessibility	Don't play the game if you can't play regularly, Heung et al. [32]	Toxic speech
Mocking & Invalidating Disability Identity	Mocking Disability	You can't hear haha	Toxic speech, overloading
	Accusing of Faking Disability	You are faking it! Heung et al. [32], Sannon et al. [61]	Toxic speech, misinformation, impersonation, surveillance
Objectifying the Disabled Body	Attacking Physical Appearance	You look like a demon	Toxic speech
	Sexual Harassment & Fetishization	I know she can't feel down there, Sannon et al. [61] Heung et al. [32]	Toxic speech, Overloading

Violent & Eugenics-Related Speech, Questioning Ability & Denying Access, Mocking & Invalidating Disability Identity, and Objectifying the Disabled Body. For each type of ableist hate, we present examples from our findings and prior work (if applicable), and map them to the general type(s) of online hate and harassment using the framework presented by [69]. Our findings surfaced general types of online hate and harassment, including toxic content (e.g., bullying, trolling, hate speech, threats of violence, incitement, unwanted explicit content), overloading (e.g., comment spam, dogpiling, brigading, negative ratings and reviews), false reporting (e.g., falsified abuse report, falsified abuse flag), and impersonation (e.g., impersonated profiles).

In addition, we document new types of ableist hate. For example, "Denial and Stigmatization of Accessibility" occurred when disabled content creators received stigmatizing comments about accessibility features (e.g., "don't play the game if you can't play

regularly"). These comments were commmonly paired with violent speech in response to simply asking about accessibility features or advocating for accessible games (e.g., "go kill yourself"). Despite legal protection under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), disabled people often have to demand access despite the supposed benefits of universal design [71]. This systemic issue forces disabled users to depend on vocal requests for access online, making them more susceptible to subsequent hate and further denials of their right to access. While Heung et al. [32] found instances of microaggressions related to neglecting accessibility accommodations, we found direct and hateful denials of disabled people's rights to access. We add to the work of Sannon et al. [61] with disability activists by capturing new instances of ableist hate towards other types of content creators, such as disabled gamers.

Our research provides empirical instances where types of ableist hate take on new and severe forms. For example, prior studies

[25, 32, 61] have highlighted this phenomenon where harassers accuse individuals of faking their disabilities. We document new examples of this type of harassment, coupled with other tactics such as spreading misinformation (e.g., websites containing false information about disabilities) and impersonation (e.g., pretending to be the creator's family members to lend credibility to the accusations). These tactics aim to make the accusations more believable, which can inflict damage to the creator's reputation and invite more hate from others.

Although we present ableist hate as distinct types, these types overlap and interact with one another. For example, the "Denial and Stigmatization of Accessibility" type further promotes the inaccessibility of the digital environment. As inaccessible interfaces can exclude a disabled person from completing a task, this reinforces the ableist notion that disability equates to inability, following the "Disability as Inability" type. Furthermore, framing disability as inherently negative or less-than stigmatizes the word disability, which is related to the "Using Disability as an Insult" type. Perpetuating one type of hate may reinforce other types of ableism.

Conversely, some forms of ableist hate contradict and exclude one another. For the "Mocking & Invalidating Disability Identity" category, while some harassers invalidated creators' disability identities, others mocked them for having a disability. When a disabled creator responded to harassers and asserted their disability identity in the face of invalidating comments, they also became targets for mockery. While the "Attacking Physical Appearance" type and "Sexual Harassment & Fetishization" type both encompass objectifying remarks, the sentiment expressed in these types are different: the former denounces and vilifies the disabled body, while the latter characterizes the disabled body as desirable and attractive in an uncomfortable and nonconsensual way. Our findings show that the paradoxical nature of ableist hate and harassment makes it difficult for disabled people to protect themselves from ableism.

We also consider intersectionality in the context of ableist hate and harassment. Ableist hate is inherently intersectional: disability intersects *all* other social identities (e.g., gender, race, sexual orientation). Historically, "the concept of disability has been used to justify discrimination against other groups by attributing disability to them" [3]. Our research not only demonstrates that intersecting identities can result in a disproportionate amount of ableist hate and harassment (e.g., LGBTQ disabled creators face a higher risk), but also reveals how ableist hate can further oppress people with multiple marginalized identities. For example, one harasser labeled a creator's disability and queerness as "double-handicapped." The harasser stigmatized disability while simultaneously attacking the creator's queer identity, demonstrating how the "Using Disability as an Insult" type could be perpetuated alongside other identity-based harassment. This showcases how intersectional ableist hate manifests differently and can cause compounded harm towards creators with multiple marginalized identities.

Our taxonomy shows how ableist hate and harassment have distinct and unique manifestations. If platforms do not have context about a user's disability or knowledge about disability history and stereotypes, ableist hate may circumvent moderation checkpoints. For example, language related to eugenics, such as "survival of the fittest," may go unnoticed by moderators if they are not familiar with eugenics and disability. In addition, ableist speech may not be detected by current algorithms used to automate content moderation. Prior work has shown that sentiment analysis and toxicity detection models inaccurately score disability-related sentences as toxic [31, 74]. Such false-positives are also found in LGBTQ speech [53]. This calls into question if current AI moderation systems *can and should* detect ableist speech, especially with the possibility of wrongfully identifying toxic content and censoring disability-related content online. Wrongful censorship is another form of ableism, as identified by participants, that should be taken into account when evaluating the effectiveness of automated content moderation.

Overall, failing to address and acknowledge ableism leads to additional harm and burden for disabled content creators, which we discuss in the next section.

5.2 Infrastructure Lens on Platform-Enabled Ableism

We use an infrastructure lens to analyze ableist experiences on social media to highlight the gaps in platform moderation (infrastructural breakdowns) and the labor (infrastructural work) that disabled content creators must undergo to cope with ableism. Due to gaps in platform moderation, disabled creators practiced strategies to be resilient towards ableist hate; however, such strategies impede their ability to freely self-express and create authentic content online.

5.2.1 Background on Infrastructure. To holistically discuss ableist experiences between the creator, their followers, and the social media platform, we draw on this notion of infrastructure as an analytical lens. The concept of digital infrastructure has been compared to physical infrastructures (e.g., railroads). When they work as expected, the infrastructure is invisible to the user [68]. If the infrastructure breaks (i.e., infrastructural breakdown), this requires infrastructural work to fix or mediate the effects of the breakdown [68, 77]. At this point, the infrastructure becomes visible to users. During prolonged infrastructural breakdowns, people build resilience "to bounce back from, manage, and overcome disruption" [63].

Recently, HCI researchers have applied an infrastructure lens to analyze technology breakdowns [56, 63], peer-to-peer online support [17], and social media [66]. An infrastructure lens highlights the work that is done during a breakdown that is often ignored or considered as "invisible labor." For example, Simpson et al. [66] labeled creative labor as a form of infrastructural work done by LGBTQ TikTokers to circumvent algorithmic exclusion. One can think of access labor as infrastructural work that is needed to overcome inaccessibility in the workplace [8, 45] and in social spaces [65, 82].

5.2.2 Ableist Breakdowns, Infrastructural Work, and Resilience. We frame how platforms facilitate and exacerbate ableist experiences as infrastructural breakdowns, and discuss ways in which disabled content creators mitigated ableist harm as infrastructural work. Over time, disabled content creators adopted long-term strategies (e.g., reducing visibility of their disability) to develop resilience toward platforms' infrastructural breakdowns. In Figure 1, we summarize two ableist infrastructural breakdowns, short-term impacts
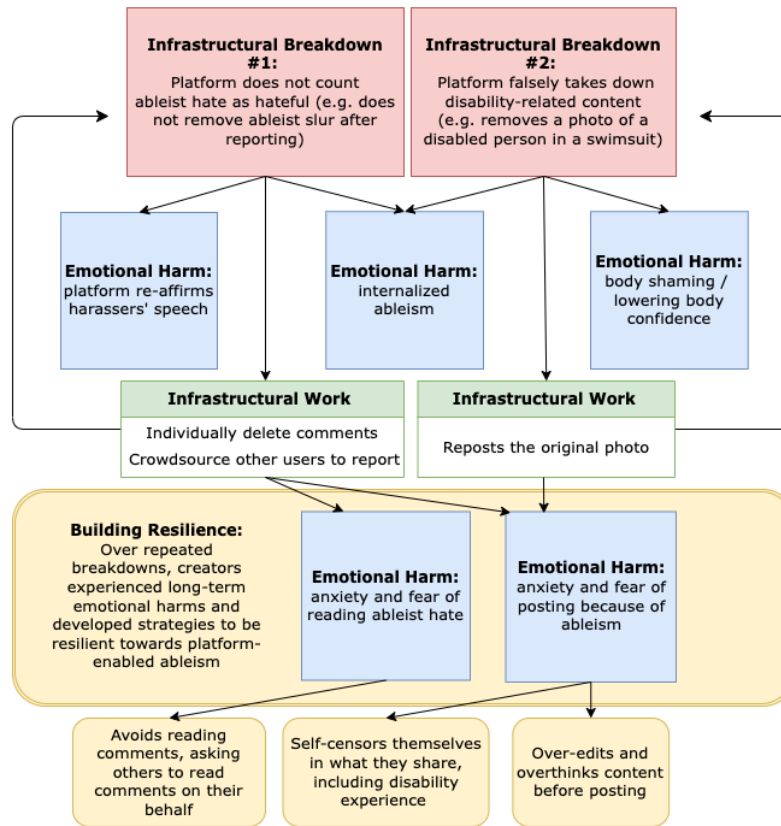
Figure 1: Infrastructure lens on platform-enabled ableism, summarizing the infrastructural breakdown, the infrastructural work, the emotional harms, and long-term strategies for building resilience.

(emotional harm and infrastructural work), and long-term strategies for building resilience towards ableist hate and harassment.

One infrastructural breakdown occurred when platforms did not count ableism as hate or chose not to remove ableist hate. While the platform reporting process is meant to address users' experiences with hate and harassment, ableism was not recognized as a violation of community guidelines. As a result, the disabled creators were required to do infrastructural work to ensure they were creating an inclusive digital space (e.g., participants deleted comments to avoid triggering their followers or asked other users to report the comment hoping that the platform would remove it). Furthermore, prior work has shown how disabled content creators perceived that having hate on their posts will lead to content suppression [12], which may increase pressure on creators to individually delete ableist comments. Platform negligence to address hate and harassment can reaffirm hateful speech, which may further contribute to internalized ableism.

Another infrastructural breakdown in moderation arose when platforms falsely censored content that complied with community guidelines, such as removing a photo of a disabled person in a swimsuit. Participants deemed this as ableist, as non-disabled bodies were "allowed" to be displayed in a swimsuit. The removal and censorship of disabled bodies while non-disabled bodies remained visible reinforced able-bodied norms. Prior work has found that

shadowbanning, content suppression, and lack of transparency causes emotional and psychological harms, such as confusion and anxiety [10, 19, 55]. We extend this literature by describing instances of disability-related content being censored altogether and detailing how this may exacerbate internalized ableism and lower body confidence. Additionally, as acknowledged by our participants, such wrongful censorship may lead to reduced engagement and economic losses for creators.

Because of these infrastructural breakdowns over time, disabled content creators have developed strategies to be resilient to harm. These strategies included self-censoring aspects of their disability, such as deciding to not show a photo of themselves in a wheelchair or choosing to not disclose exactly what disability they have. Although further concealing one's disability identity can negatively affect the creator's psychological well-being [75], concealing the visibility of their disability digitally served as a last-resort tactic to protect themselves from ableist hate and harassment. Creators also shielded themselves from reading ableist hate by ignoring comments or asking others to read the comments on their behalf. In attempts to prevent ableist hate, creators spent additional time over-editing and overthinking. However, constantly filtering and editing content to minimize the likelihood of ableist hate also caused creators to experience anxiety. Overall, these strategies that creators developed to be resilient toward ableist hate came at the cost of

their self-expression, well-being, and time. Similar to prior work on disabled creators [12, 61], participants navigated the tension of being authentic and fully disclosing their disability experience, while realizing that this would put them at higher risk of ableism.

Due to these breakdowns, disabled content creators bear the burden of avoiding harassment. In prior work, security experts acknowledged that this burden is inequitably distributed, as marginalized populations already face limitations to self-expression online [80]. In response to the prevalence of hate and harassment online, HCI researchers have proposed ways that platforms can be designed to mitigate the harm of viewing hate, such as through blocklists [35] and word filters [34]. Such designs allow individuals to protect themselves from hate and harassment, which may also require additional labor. Similar to access labor, this labor needed to individually protect creators from ableist hate is yet another form of invisible labor. Future work should consider how the design of platforms can mitigate the harm of ableist experiences while balancing additional labor on the individual.

5.3 Limitations & Future Work

Our study was limited to active content creators; those who have permanently left content creation and social media platforms altogether may have had more severe online hate experiences. Given our sample size, our statistical models are not representative of *all* disabled content creators, which may contribute to the lack of significance found in gender and race. No significance of race and gender in our model does not mean that such identities do not affect experiences with ableist hate and harassment. For instance, we found qualitative evidence (Section 4.2.2) of ableism and racism being intertwined within multiple instances of hate. Gender could also affect the types of ableist hate and harassment that creators receive. Prior work has shown that female content creators are at a higher risk of experiencing rumors and conspiracy theories, sexual harassment, excessive negative reviews, and stalking and surveillance [70]. Being a female, woman, or non-binary disabled content creator could play a role in the frequency and severity of receiving ableist hate in the "Attacking Physical Appearance" and "Sexual Harassment & Fetishization" types. Future work should continue to investigate intersectional ableist experiences, especially between gender and race. Although our statistical modeling has limitations, this paper contributes a descriptive, quantitative model of an understudied population, demonstrating significant intersectional differences.

Future work should also continue to examine the similarities and differences of ableist hate and harassment across different platforms (e.g., TikTok vs. LinkedIn), between different cultural contexts, between different disabilities (e.g., situational vs. permanent disabilities and invisible vs. visible disabilities), and on emerging and immersive platforms such as social VR [28, 82]. Furthermore, alternative methodologies such as data scraping social media posts may give rise to new instances of ableist hate and harassment, and can also provide an in-depth understanding of which types of ableism are more frequent than others. While we contribute empirical evidence of wrongful censorship, more work is needed to

conduct an algorithmic audit and evaluate to what extent disability-related content is being suppressed, demonetized, and censored across varying social media platforms.

6 CONCLUSION

Our study presents the end-to-end experience of ableist hate and harassment experienced by disabled content creators, including what they experienced and how they coped. We developed a taxonomy of ableist hate and harassment, provided empirical evidence of wrongful censorship of disability-related content, and modeled differences in frequency of ableist hate experienced given creators' intersecting social identities. Our models signal that intersectionality may contribute to an increased risk of ableist hate and harassment. We contribute an in-depth analysis of ableist experiences on social media to further conversations on online hate and harassment.

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