The Politics of (Dis)Information: *Crippled America*, the 25th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the 2016 U.S. Presidential Campaign

Authors

Stephanie Cork, University of Maryland

Paul T. Jaeger, University of Maryland

Shannon Jette, University of Maryland

Stefanie Ebrahimoff, Long Island University Brooklyn

Abstract

Politics—especially presidential campaigns—are an important means by which to examine the values and issues that are given priority by members of a society and the people who wish to be leaders of that society. The issues discussed in a campaign and the ways in which they are discussed reveal much about social attitudes and policy goals. In the past 20 years, information and communication technologies have simultaneously become central policy issues at the national level (access, privacy, security, etc.) and the main channels by which candidates engage their supporters (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc.). This paper examines the dual roles of information and communication technologies in the 2016 presidential campaign in the United States through the lens of disability issues. This particular focus was driven by the occurrence of the 25th anniversary of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) during the first year of the campaign and, more significantly, the intersection of disability, information, and technology being a major civil rights issue for people with disabilities, who represent nearly one-fifth of the population of the United States. This study collected and analyzed campaign materials about disability issues released online by selected presidential campaigns, as well as news stories and other related Web content, to better understand the issues related to disability being discussed in the campaign and the implications of those issues for people with disabilities.

Introduction: Information Politics 2016

Information issues are so embedded in our daily lives that they are often key aspects of political debates and campaigns in terms of both the content of political campaigns and usage of information technology by political campaigns. These issues are often not framed as information issues, but instead many separate issues of privacy, security, social media, big data, net neutrality, and many other pieces of larger information challenges and problems (Jaeger, Paquette, & Simmons, 2010). Information issues have also become increasingly politicized in recent years—primarily as information and communication technologies (ICTs) have become omnipresent parts of daily lives—as evidenced by the fact that debates and proposed policies related to information by candidates have clear partisan objectives, often extending far beyond the information issues (Jaeger, 2007, 2009). As such, information issues have simultaneously become a part of political platforms and means for politicians to accomplish their policy and political goals.

Reflecting this growing importance of information and ICTs, presidential campaigns have also changed dramatically in their use of information to reach targeted audiences and control their messages. Not that many years ago, presidential campaigns struggled with even the basic usage of the Internet, from Bob Dole mangling his own website address in 1996 to Al Gore claiming credit for creating the Internet in 2000 to former President George W. Bush's bafflement at "the Google" and "the Internets" (Klotz, 2004). President Barack Obama's campaign in 2008, however, dramatically changed the relationship between major campaigns and the Internet, at least in the United States. While his opponent—Senator John McCain—dealt with information issues only peripherally and maintained only a limited online presence, Obama emphasized information issues as key parts of his economic, infrastructure, and innovation plans, and his campaign maintained a large online presence though Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Twitter, and Flickr, sent over 1 billion emails, and coordinated and organized tens of thousands of campaign activities online (Jaeger et al., 2010).

Now, presidential campaigns in the United States need a significant online presence to even get started, with most fundraising occurring online and many campaigns even announcing the start of the campaign online. The power of social media to reach interested potential supporters and to harness the funds and time of current supporters has grown so significantly that campaigns are able to draw supporters with much less reliance on traditional means, such as television and radio advertisements. Additionally, candidates can more easily construct a narrative for their campaign and continually reinforce it with their supporters. One of the reasons that the 2016 primary season was able to support an unprecedented number of contenders for so long is that social media now allows many more candidates to stay engaged with their supporters (however small their numbers may be) without the need to rely on traditional media for continued exposure.

In the vastly changed media landscape for presidential campaigns, the process of following the campaign platforms and messages has also changed. Platforms and position papers have given way to a reliance on more fluid messaging through social media channels—Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and many others—that focuses directly on

continual contact with their supporters. The new sea of opportunities to reach supporters clearly also offers candidates the ability to address a wider range of issues in depth, should they choose. However, many candidates are instead using the multiple channels to simply repeat the same messages or connect with supporters in non-political ways, perhaps most bizarrely evidenced by the videos posted by the Ted Cruz campaign of their candidate doing hapless impressions of characters from *The Simpsons* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_K0sRkvX4KE) or making "machine gun bacon" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EaZGaJrd3x8).

Disability in 2016 Presidential Discourse

In order to explore the limitless new information world of presidential campaigns and its impact on policies, this study examines the ways in which the campaigns addressed the issue of disability. Disability has been present throughout known history; it is a natural part of the human condition (Scheer & Groce, 1998). Yet, it has also been a focus of exclusion, hostility, and bigotry, with it usually being seen as a "self-evident truth" in societies that people with disabilities are outsiders (Johnson, 2006, p. 54). The othering of people with disabilities has often been a political issue, with many societies basing their discrimination of people with disabilities on popular acclaim from the public, resulting in policies including sterilization, institutionalization, deportation, and even execution of people with disabilities (Campbell, 2009; Hahn, 1988; Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Hirschmann & Linker, 2015). Disability affects the lives of nearly one-fifth of people in the world, reflecting the natural variations of all living beings. Their social distancing is one of the central challenges for people with disabilities in achieving equality and equal participation in society (Jaeger, 2012, 2013; Jaeger & Bowman, 2005). People with disabilities provoke "a kind of panic both internal and external" and are thus confronted by their home societies with discomfort, awkwardness, feigned concern, inspiration, pity, sympathy, sentimentality, indifference, hostility, and gratitude at not having a disability (Stiker, 1999, p. 9). These reactions are all forms of emphasizing the otherness of disability (Swain, French, & Cameron, 2003; Thomas, 1982; Vash & Crewe, 2004). A range of studies have revealed that this emphasis on otherness directly results in the distancing of people with disabilities from people without disabilities in a wide array of social contexts (Horne & Ricardi, 1988). "For most people, 'it goes without saying' that they are human beings. For disabled people in many historical contexts 'it has to be said'" (Hughes, 2007, p. 677). Overall, the ways in which disability issues were expressed during the 2016 U.S. presidential election cycle were ableist, ignoring the needs of, and at the direct expense of, people with disabilities. However, political processes have also been the primary means through which people with disabilities have gained the rights that they now possess (Colker, 2005; Downey, 2008; Jaeger, 2012, 2013). The focus on disability issues in this particular campaign was driven by several factors.

First, 2015 marked the 25th anniversary of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which mandated inclusion and equal participation for people with disabilities (mental and physical) in many aspects of society, including government, commerce, education, travel, and entertainment. It is an important anniversary of one of the more profound pieces of civil rights legislation in world history. This law, and its significant

consequences for persons with disabilities, has been widely and rightly celebrated for making America a more just and fair place; many nations around the world have modeled their own disability rights laws directly on the ADA. As a consequence of the importance of ICTs in education, employment, communication, civic participation, and much else, equity of access to ICTs and to online information is a major civil rights issue for people with disabilities under the ADA and other laws (Jaeger, 2012, 2013).

Second, people with disabilities are the largest minority group in the United States and thus are a huge portion of the electorate. Recent numbers from the Census Bureau suggest that 54.4 million Americans have a disability—which is 18.7% of the overall population—and, in part due to an aging population, the number of individuals with some type of disability is anticipated to grow (Brault, 2010). Their outcomes, including in health, employment, and education, are far worse when compared to the rest of the population. Recent statistics show that persons with disabilities of working (and voting) age (between 15 and 64) have much lower graduation and workforce participation rates compared to their non-disabled peers. While only a small percentage have less than a high school diploma, those with a bachelor's degree or higher stands at only 13.5% for severe disability and 23.6% for non-severe disability, compared to 34.1% of the non-disabled population (Stoddard, 2014, p. 22). Similarly, people with disabilities have much lower levels of digital literacy and access to the Internet or a broadband connection than the rest of society (Jaeger, 2012). These differences have a direct impact on labor force participation, which has declined from 39.1% to 33.9% between 2008 and 2013 (Stoddard, 2014, p. 16). Though there has been a similar decline within non-disabled populations (from 77.7% in 2009 to 74.2% in 2013), these rates continue to be exaggerated for those with severe or multiple disabilities (Colker, 2005; Jaeger, 2013). This population also shows extreme health disparities and is overrepresented in obesity and chronic illnesses rates, beyond the disability diagnosis (Krahn, Klein Walker, & Correa-De-Araujo, 2015). With rising rates of unemployment, especially for blue-collar factory jobs, more and more out-of-work individuals are relying on disability insurance for survival. This leads some to suggest that "disability is the new welfare" (Weissman, 2015). Though these are complex issues, they demonstrate the multiple challenges with disability that candidates could address through topics like federal spending on labor, health, and education. Addressing issues of disability would seemingly be an important way to connect with voters with disabilities, as well as to educate other voters about important disability rights issues.

Third, disability issues are strongly tied to information technologies, including the Internet and social media. People with disabilities have the lowest levels of Internet and broadband access of any population in the United States as a result of a range of technical and socioeconomic factors (Jaeger, 2012, 2013). While Internet technologies, mobile devices, and social media offer enormous opportunities to promote inclusion of people with disabilities, these technologies are often not designed to be usable by people with sensory, cognitive, and mobility impairments (Lazar & Jaeger, 2011; Wentz, Jaeger, & Lazar, 2011). For persons with disability, access to relevant information affects not only their participation within the political process but can also impact their health, education, and employment outcomes (Krahn et al., 2015). A focus on disability issues by a

campaign could support persons with disabilities and educate other voters by addressing the intersection between ICTs and disability rights.

Finally, and most curiously, lived personal experience with health issues—though not actual disabilities—is an undercurrent in the presidential campaign for several candidates. Former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee has built his campaign narrative around his struggles with obesity and diabetes, while former New Jersey governor Chris Christie's obesity was a far more significant and a recurring issue for his candidacy. Christie also spoke about addiction openly as a campaign issue. Some Republicans have tried to call attention to Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's fitness for the presidency after suffering a concussion in 2014. While none of these examples seemingly rise to the level of a catastrophic hindrance in the ability to govern, even the false accusation or implication of some disability has heavily shaped the outcomes of presidential elections as recently as the 1988 election (Dukakis, 2014). Rumors of mental health issues sent the poll numbers of the former Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis, the Democratic presidential nominee, plummeting. When reflecting on this incident at the Presidential Disability and Succession symposium in 2013, Dukakis argued that this was one of the reasons he lost the campaign to the Republican candidate, former President Ronald Reagan. More recently, in a 2014 gubernatorial race, the issue of disability became a central theme to the campaign. Texas governor Greg Abbott, a wheelchair user, made his recovery from having his spine broken in an accident a central part of his campaign narrative. He was accused of being insufficiently supportive of disability rights and insufficiently disabled by his non-disabled opponent, Senator Wendy Davis. She ran an ad (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lush7TZB860) that claimed Abbott spent "his career working against other victims" and seemed to mock him for seeking damages for his injury. The *Washington Post* labeled it "one of the nastiest campaign ads you will ever see" (Blake, 2014), and the ad significantly changed the race by greatly increasing support for Abbott, who won the governorship with a margin of victory of more than 20 percentage points (Root, 2014; Montgomery, 2014; Wilson, 2014). This 2014 Texas race in some ways seems to give more incentive to address disability issues, as perceived attacks on disability were treated very negatively by voters in that state.

Methodology

Given this complex backdrop of ICTs and disability storylines (both overt and subtle), in this study we pursued the following questions:

- How did the rhetoric of disability inform the current presidential race and how was it expressed to voters?
- Were disability rights—especially issues of access to information and ICTs—even seen (overtly) on the agenda of the candidates?
- What was the role of social media and other information channels in spreading messages about disability by the campaigns?

Though these are general questions, they helped frame our search for relevant online campaign materials. Further, these questions help confront the cultural ableism that seemed to permeate the campaigns for both Democratic and Republican candidates.

The online presence of a political campaign is now a central means by which a campaign defines its message, disseminates policy stances, reaches supporters, raises funds, recruits new supporters, and organizes support so that it turns into actual votes. Analyzing the online presence of a campaign at the national level reveals a great deal about the policy priorities of each of the candidates and about the perceived priorities of the electorate as a whole, as well as the use of online information and communication and ICTs to reach voters (Jaeger et al., 2010). For this paper, our analysis was based on data scraped from candidate websites and social media presence for a one-week period from October 9 through October 15, 2015. In our examination of the confluence of presidential campaigns, information, and disability, the two key areas of focus were the information issues raised by the candidates' presentations of disability and the linguistic engagement with disability, or lack thereof.

The material analyzed included the official websites, social media feeds, and other candidate statements available online, as well as searching for the candidate's name and the terms "disability" and "disabled" in search engines. Given the unusual size of the field of contenders in the two major parties at the time of the data collection, we focused on the online presences of candidates leading in the polls and/or in fundraising at the time of the data collection. A field of 22 candidates—few with any real chance of election—necessitated narrowing the pool to those that seemed most likely to have electoral success based on polls and fundraising.

As such, Secretary Hilary Clinton and Senator Bernie Sanders of New Hampshire were selected from the Democratic side for leading both polls and fundraising, while for the Republican side, Donald Trump and Dr. Ben Carson were selected for their then co-leadership in the polls and governors Jeb Bush of Florida and Scott Walker of Wisconsin were selected for their fundraising successes. The limitations of fundraising as selection criteria were revealed shortly thereafter when Walker had to drop out of the race not for lack of money but for lack of support.

Findings

Overall, disability—in spite of the reasons that it might be a significant issue, as detailed above—seems to have been mostly ignored in the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign. The majority of mentions our searches identified were as passing references in discussions of health care or veterans' issues. Four (Trump, Carson, Bush, and Walker) of the official online presences—websites, social media, and other channels—of the candidates studied did not mention disability at all beyond a minimal presence in these other contexts. However, two (Clinton and Sanders) of the official online presences discussed disability as an issue of policy and rights at length.

Beyond the official online presence, the information found in the secondary searching was helpful in some sense because it gave light to news articles and other related articles about what these candidates have to say—if anything—about disability. However, many of these news articles were from local papers, blog posts, or obscure websites, so whatever comments about disability were made in these interviews likely only reached a small population, specifically only people who are actively searching for this information or

people living in that town or city who might read these articles. Even in these more localized stories, the appearances of disability were primarily limited to discussions of health care or veterans' issues.

The overall impression is that most of the candidates have a vague awareness that people with disabilities exist, but not that any policy issues or actions might be relevant to their existence. Perhaps most surprisingly, with the exception of one candidate (Clinton), at the time of our analysis the ADA was not even mentioned in the official online presence of any of the candidates studied. Perhaps least surprisingly, the Democratic candidates discussed disability issues far more.

On the Republican side, three of the four candidates studied offered virtually nothing about disability issues in their official online presences. Dr. Ben Carson mentioned disability issues the least of any of the candidates. Disability was not mentioned on his campaign website and was not found to be a part of his official online presence in any other way, and no mention of it appeared in the searches of other sources online. This lack of discussion seems to be rather incongruous with his background as a neurosurgeon who rose to fame after separating twins who were conjoined at the skull (Terris & Kirchner, 2015). Yet, disability issues apparently do not come up in his position papers, speeches, or interviews.

Jeb Bush and Scott Walker had similar online footprints related to disability—local, small stories in their home states during their tenure as Governor (Walker current and Bush 1999–2007). These stories did not reveal broader positions or policies; rather, they detailed specific events that somehow related to disability issues. In their official online presences, the closest either came to a statement about disability in terms of policy or rights was Jeb Bush. Bush's official campaign site did explicitly include disabled veterans as part of a stated policy emphasis on improving services and healthcare opportunities for veterans in the United States.

Donald Trump's official campaign website placed a significant emphasis on fixing the "broken" mental health system. Other than that policy issue, however, disability as an issue of rights or policy has not been a notable part of the official Trump campaign presence. Instead, Trump has relied on his conservative scare tactics and his over-the-top rhetoric surrounding people with disabilities, which continues to garner a great amount of attention in the news media and online.

The main engagement of the Trump campaign with disability has been confrontational and insulting through direct statements from the candidate. His blatant mocking of the physical disability of *New York Times* reporter Serge Kovaleski in November 2015 gained a great amount of attention and condemnation. Trump imitated Kovaleski's body language in a "jerky fashion" ("Trump 'mocks,'" 2015), claiming that he "felt sorry for the guy," though he denied this despicable behavior in spite of recorded evidence. Trump also mocked Charles Krauthammer, a columnist with a disability, during an interview on October 12, 2015, while the data collection for this study was happening (Holger, 2015). Trump took aim at Krauthammer's status as a wheelchair user in an attempt to undermine the Pulitzer Prize winning author's criticisms of him.

Further, Trump has linked gun control issues to mental illness and has continued to discuss individuals with mental illness as the problem, an argument echoed by Ben

Carson (Vitali, 2015). Both Republican candidates, because of their support of the Second Amendment, view gun violence as a failing of the mental health system and decry access to firearms for people with disabilities. Instead of attempting to impose limits on all citizens, both candidates locate the issue with "dangerous" or "sick" individuals (CBN News, 2015). This perpetuates a false comprehension of gun violence and does not facilitate an understanding of weapon use and abuse as a systemic issue in the United States, but rather exaggerates and pathologizes those with mental illness as inherently violent. The ADA clearly delineates the needs of those with disabilities in regards to physical and mental impairments, which perhaps demonstrates both candidates' lack of familiarity with the rights of individuals under the banner of "disability."

Many other examples of Trump using abusive and degrading language related to disability can readily be found in interviews and columns, and he even released a campaign book entitled *Crippled America* (Trump, 2015) in which he bemoans the state of America and promises to make the country "great again." What remains clear is that the rhetoric of disability plays an important role in the campaign and informs the ableist information that Republican candidates are putting forward to their constituents. In one sense, these statements can be viewed as part of Trump's overall campaign of insults and denigration of others, including women, immigrants, Latinos, African Americans, Muslims, the overweight, and nursing mothers, among others. However, the *Washington Post*, along with many other commentators, has noted that all of Trump's statements disparaging others have been "calculated to inflame and exploit voter fears and prejudice" (*Washington Post*, 2015, p. A16). Viewed through this perspective, the choice of his book title—a word considered a slur against people with disabilities—demonstrates a heightened level of denigration of people with disabilities by belittling this population in such a prominent manner.

On the Democratic side, in stark contrast, both candidates studied put a great deal more emphasis on disability as an issue of policy and rights in their campaigns. Hillary Clinton's campaign website included aspirational social goals related to disability as part of the campaign focus on expanding opportunities for all Americans. It includes the clear statement that "We should acknowledge how the disabilities community has played such an important role in changing things for the better in our country" (Hillary for America, 2016a). Her official campaign site and other statements from her campaign emphasize this commitment to working and fighting for the rights of Americans with disabilities, frequently noting the importance of the ADA.

The focus on the value and contributions of the ADA is particularly notable in Clinton's online presence. The campaign even released a policy paper about disability issues (Hillary for America, 2016b). Most interestingly, the campaign established an entire Facebook page dedicated to discussing the candidate's commitment to and previous work related to disability issues and to providing a forum for her supporters with disabilities to discuss the impacts of her efforts on their lives (https://www.facebook.com/PWDs4Hillary). This page also included a video of Hillary supporters both able-bodied and disabled in the Women 4 Hillary campaign. In this way, Hillary's campaign perhaps indicated some nuance looking to the intersection of disability and gender, though the general level of engagement was superficial and did not confront any of the actual issues this populations faces.

The other main Democratic candidate, Bernie Sanders, also devoted considerable attention to disability as an issue of policy and rights. His campaign website featured a detailed section on Civil and Equal Rights for People with Disabilities (Feelthebern.org, 2016) that both addressed disability issues as issues of civil rights and provided resources to learn more about the issues that were discussed. His official campaign presence also addressed disability issues as part of discussions of universal healthcare, women's health issues, homelessness, and healthcare for veterans. Like Bush and Walker, materials can readily be found from his interactions with disability as a state-level public official. Unlike the Bush and Walker materials, however, they feature clear statements about his support of disability rights and opposition to cuts in disability-related support and funding.

"Crippled America"? Or Two Americas?

The culture of ableism seems, like the ADA itself, to be a bipartisan issue. Whether through overt slurs against persons with disabilities (Republicans) or a lack of voice on this issue (Democrats), it seems that people with disabilities as a minority population were mostly rendered invisible during this campaign. Though both Democratic candidates attempted to include some general information on disability rights, nowhere do they link informational access to larger issues of disability advocacy and justice. As such, though the Democratic candidates might seem to engage with this population, they have not taken this group seriously as a necessary voting bloc and attempts to reach out were superficial, even tokenistic. Unlike campaigns catered to other minority populations, including women, African American, Latino, Hispanic, Sikh, and Muslim groups, neither Democratic candidate has taken a stand for or with this group. However, the approach to disability that Sanders and Clinton propose is much "safer" than the dangerous comments made by Carson and Trump. Therefore, one wonders whether there is fear about disability, as candidates remain relatively silent when it comes to confronting these issues head-on. Perhaps the events of the 2014 Texas gubernatorial campaign have made overt discussions surrounding issues of disability taboo (Wilson, 2014).

The ubiquity of ableist terminology in American politics demonstrates the undercurrent of discrimination that comes to the surface at election time. Disability has historically been positioned as a justification for education and employment discrimination as well as limiting immigration (Fleischer & Zames, 2001; Hirschmann & Linker, 2015; Scotch, 2001). Though the ADA, along with other major disability rights laws such as Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), were meant to change the attitudes and material resources allocated to people with disabilities, there continues to be a problematic silence around these issues. Even the passage of laws promoting disability rights is often insufficient to lead directly to a practical increase in those rights. After the passage of both the Rehabilitation Act and IDEA, for example, three presidents avoided implementing the laws until a series of protests and occupations of government buildings led to President Jimmy Carter's administration finally making the laws a reality (Fleischer & Zames, 2001; Scotch, 2001).

The cultural acceptance of this ableism seems to be commonplace in this presidential race but is also exacerbated by Trump's extremist politics. Though it is argued that such manifestations are just words, the continued disenfranchisement of people with disabilities

in America shows a need to recognize that there are power dynamics embedded within this process (Price, 2011; Cohen-Rottenberg, 2015). These ideological issues therefore need to be addressed if material change is to occur. Unless candidates pay more attention to this group through increasing online engagement and new policies intended to promote inclusion and access for persons with disabilities, this is a voting bloc that will remain ignored.

Key Lessons and Conclusions

What is clear is that all the candidates missed an opportunity to connect with and give voice to people with disabilities through social media and missed an opportunity to educate about disability issues. Though Clinton and Sanders have given some attention to disability, there is seemingly no mention of the ADA turning 25. Even the more comprehensive disability-focused sites launched by each of the Democratic campaigns since the data collection for this study (Friends of Bernie Sanders, 2016 and Hillary for America, 2016b) neglect the ADA milestone. The bipartisan efforts to put this piece of legislation into effect in 1990 are apparently a lost chance to educate about disability history and celebrate civil rights for people with disabilities. Candidate avoidance, ignorance, or disinterest about the issues confronting people with disabilities across the nation parallels the initial resistance to implementing disability rights legislation (Scotch, 2001).

On the flipside is the dangerous and damaging rhetoric and politics related to disability from Trump and other Republicans. While Carson and Trump took aim at mental illness in relation to gun control, Trump himself has been clear in his discriminatory rhetoric toward all persons with disabilities. Without any knowledge about the real issues facing people with disabilities in the United States, the education, labor, healthcare, economic, and other barriers faced by this population will continue to be ignored. Throughout recorded history, disability has been associated with evil, with threats, and with death (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005), and the discussion of mental illness as the driver of gun violence shows that persons with disabilities continue to be seen as dangerous. Like the book *Crippled America*, the country is characterized as being susceptible to an invisible disabled threat. The only way that candidates respond to this real issue is through damaging rhetoric or superficial engagement.

Ableist language and the increased (in)visibility of disability as a minority group acts as a method to erase the "problem" of disability, relegating these civil rights needs to specialized services. In spite of legal frameworks that establish civil rights for individuals with disabilities in the United States, the individual experience can be much more complicated. Disability issues are translated into areas such as Veterans Affairs or the healthcare system. This is related to the ways in which disability has been historically understood through American policy systems:

> "The term 'disability' has varying meaning in at least three different contexts: In the Workers' Compensation program "disability means the damages that one person collects from another as an insult or injury. In the Social Security Disability Insurance program, disability refers to a condition that links ill health

>and unemployment. And in the context of civil rights laws, 'disability' is linked to discrimination" (Fleischer & Zames, 2001, p. 110)."

However, this entire nuance was lost within the Republican and Democratic views on disability, whether absent, superficial, or damaging; it is clear that more needs to be done to address the needs of this population.

Online information and communication and ICTs—if accessible—offer people with disabilities considerable opportunities for increased involvement in education, employment, civic engagement, and much else. A presidential campaign occurring in conjunction with the 25th anniversary of the ADA offered a unique opportunity to educate voters about continuing disability issues directly through online channels. Instead of ignoring these issues or only addressing them superficially, candidates need to be pressured, on both sides, to address the needs of people with disabilities. Equity of access to information and ICTs will be pivotal in this engagement, instead of empty and damaging rhetoric, to advocate for the full inclusion of voters with disability. For disability issues to become a stronger presence in the debate on both sides of the political aisle, voters, including those with disabilities, need to loudly voice their concern about these issues to the candidates through multiple online channels.

Engagement of voters with disabilities was seen to a small degree as the election closed in fall of 2016. The *Washington Post* reported that voters with disabilities—in response to the silence on disability rights and issues within the election cycle—used the Twitter hashtag [#CripTheVote](#) to bring more attention to their issues (Gibson, 2016). According to the *Post* coverage, the campaign effort was non-partisan, the goal being not to endorse a particular candidate, but rather to encourage all candidates to listen to this large and diverse minority population and recognize them as a voting bloc. Other disability-related organizations such as Rooted in Rights, Disability Thinking, and the RespectAbility Report pushed voters with disability to use social media to make their voices heard. Disability Thinking coordinated "the first two" #CripTheVote Twitter chats before the Democratic (Thursday, February 11) and Republican (Saturday, February 13) debates (Disability Thinking, 2016). These examples show the central role that ICTs are playing in creating momentum for voters with disabilities regardless of their political affinities.

The way that the candidates engage with these grassroots online campaigns is essential in fostering a more inclusive presidential campaign. ICTs and the rhetoric around disability are not only pressing civil rights issues for people with disabilities now, but will also continue to have an impact with the aging population in the United States. Disability rights are both human rights and a practical issue for many voters, and a clear display of widespread support for addressing these issues may be the only thing that will change the ways it was addressed in the 2016 presidential race.

Epilogue

The revisions of this paper were being completed during the final weeks of the presidential campaign. In that time, accusations were brought forward that Donald Trump had repeatedly used slurs (including "retarded") to describe the Oscar-winning actress Marlee Matlin, who is deaf, when she appeared on Trump's *Celebrity Apprentice*

television program several years earlier. Matlin has spoken out against this "abhorrent" term, though the accusations of its usage have been neither confirmed nor denied (Deerwester, 2016). At the same time, Hillary Clinton's campaign began airing a commercial that was a testimonial from the mother of a child with autism, who explains that she normally votes Republican but cannot imagine her son living in a country where a man who disparages people with disabilities is president (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67Z8A2Jo4Wg&feature=youtu.be).

Then came the election itself. With so many groups being described disparagingly by the Trump campaign, it is impossible to know if his discriminatory statements about people with disabilities was particularly helpful in garnering the votes he received. However, the negative comments about people with disabilities were a central part of a narrative of exclusion that appealed to enough voters to win the presidency. Similarly, one can certainly wonder whether Clinton's decision to directly and loudly associate her candidacy with supporting people with disabilities through a prominent commercial proved to be a harmful decision. Many things may have turned voters away from Clinton, and this commercial might be among the factors.

Many people have commented on the disheartening nature of the 2016 presidential campaign for myriad reasons. For people with disabilities, in particular, the rhetoric of the election and its eventual outcome are far from reassuring about their status and acceptance in society, raising significant questions about the portrayals and treatment of disability in years to come. Sadly, future candidates may look to this election and decide that negative and exclusionary portrayals of people with disabilities are a winning campaign issue.

References

Blake, A. (2014, October 10). Wendy Davis is running one of the nastiest campaign ads you will ever see. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2014/10/10/wendy-davis-is-running-one-of-the-nastiest-campaign-ads-you-will-ever-see/

Brault, M. W. (2010). Americans with disabilities: 2010. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/p70-131.pdf

Campbell, F. K. (2009). *Contours of ableism: The production of disability and abledness*. London: Palgrave.

CBN News (2015, October, 7). McCarthy to House GOP: "I'm not John Boehner." Retrieved from http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/politics/2015/October/McCarthy-to-House-GOP-Im-Not-John-Boehner

Cohen-Rottenberg, R. (2015, December 27). 10 questions that come up when you're called out for ableist language—answered. *Everyday Feminism*. Retrieved from http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/12/questions-called-out-ableism/

Colker, R. (2005). *The disability pendulum: The first decade of the Americans with Disabilities Act*. New York: New York University Press.

Disability Thinking (2016). Election 2016 voter guide—#CripTheVote. Retrieved from http://disabilitythinking.com/election-2016-cripthevote

Downey, G. J. (2008). *Closed captioning: Subtitling, stenography, and the digital convergence of text with television*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Dukakis, M. S. (2014). Campaigns and disability. *Politics and the Life Sciences*, *33*(2), 88–92.

Feelthebern.org (2016). Bernie Sanders on people with disabilities. Retrieved from http://feelthebern.org/bernie-sanders-on-people-with-disabilities/

Fleischer, D. Z., & Zames, F. (2001). *The disability rights movement: From charity to confrontation*. Philadelphia: Temple University.

Friends of Bernie Sanders (2016). Fighting For Disability Rights. Retrieved from https://berniesanders.com/issues/fighting-for-disability-rights/

Gibson, C. (2016, February 10). The 2016 conversation has ignored disabled people. Now, they want to be heard. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2016/02/10/the-2016-conversation-has-ignored-disabled-people-now-they-want-to-be-heard/

Hahn, H. (1988). The politics of physical difference: Disability and discrimination. *Journal of Social Issues*, *34*, 39–47.

Hillary for America (2016a). Hilary Clinton on Anniversary of Americans with Disabilities Act: 'We Still Have Work to Do.' Retrieved from https://www.hillaryclinton.com/briefing/statements/2015/07/26/ada-anniversary-statement/

Hillary for America (2016b). We must continue to expand opportunities for all Americans. Retrieved from https://www.hillaryclinton.com/issues/disability-rights/

Hirschmann, N. J., & Linker, B. (Eds.). (2015). *Civil disability: Citizenship, membership, and belonging*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.

Holger, D. (2015, July 11) Donald Trump insults disabled columnist in interview. *Inquisitr*. Retrieved from http://www.inquisitr.com/2244736/donald-trump-insults-disabled-columnist/.

Horne, M. D., & Ricardi, J. L. (1988). Hierarchy of response to handicaps. *Psychological Reports, 62*, 83–86. Retrieved from

Hughes, B. (2007). Being disabled: Towards a critical social ontology for disability studies. *Disability & Society, 22*(7), 673–684. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09687590701659527

Jaeger, P. T. (2007). Information policy, information access, and democratic participation: The national and international implications of the Bush administration's information politics. *Government Information Quarterly*, *24*, 840–859.

Jaeger, P. T. (2009). The fourth branch of government and the historical legacy of the Bush administration's information policies. *Government Information Quarterly*, *26*, 311–313.

Jaeger, P. T. (2012). *Disability and the Internet: Confronting a digital divide*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Jaeger, P. T. (2013). Internet justice: Reconceptualizing the legal rights of persons with disabilities to promote equal access in the age of rapid technological change. *Review of Disability Studies*, *9*(1), 39–59.

Jaeger, P. T., & Bowman, C. A. (2005). *Understanding disability: Inclusion, access, diversity, & civil rights*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Jaeger, P. T., Paquette, S., & Simmons, S. N. (2010). Information policy in national political campaigns: A comparison of the 2008 campaigns for President of the United States and Prime Minister of Canada. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, *7*, 1–16.

Johnson, H. M. (2006). *Too late to die young: Nearly true tales from a life*. New York: Holt.

Klotz, R. J. (2004). *The politics of Internet communication*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Krahn, G. L., Klein Walker, D., & Correra-De-Araujo, R. (2015). Persons with Disabilities as an unrecognized health disparity population. *American Journal of Public Health: Framing Health Matters*, *105*(S2), S198–S206.

Lazar, J., & Jaeger, P. T. (2011). Reducing barriers to online access for people with disabilities. *Issues in Science and Technology*, *17*(2), 68–82.

Price, M. (2011). *Mad at school: Rhetorics of mental disability and academic life*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

Root, J. (2014, November 19). Wendy Davis lost badly. Here's how it happened. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2014/11/06/wendy-davis-lost-really-badly-heres-how-it-happened/

Scheer, J., & Groce, N. (1998). Impairment as human constant: Cross-cultural and historical perspectives on variation. *Journal of Social Issues*, *44*, 23–37.

Scotch, R. K. (2001). *From good will to civil rights: Transforming federal disability policy*. Philadelphia: Temple University.

Stiker, H. J. (1999). *A history of disability* (W. Sayers, Trans.). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.

Stoddard, S. (2014). 2014 Disability Statistics Annual Report. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire. Retrieved from: http://www.disabilitycompendium.org/docs/default-source/2014-compendium/annual-report.pdf

Terris, B., & Kirchner, S. (2015). The story of the surgery that made Ben Carson famous—and its complicated aftermath. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/the-story-of-the-surgery-that-made-ben-carson-famous--and-its-complicated-aftermath/2015/11/13/15b5f900-88c1-11e5-be39-0034bb576eee_story.html

Trump 'mocks' disabled journalist (2015, November 27). Retrieved from http://www.iol.co.za/news/world/trump-mocks-disabled-journalist-1951587

Trump, D. J. (2015). *Crippled America: How to make America great again*. New York: Threshold.

Vitali, A. (2015, October 2) Trump: Mental illness, not guns, to blame for America's mass shooting problems. *NBC News*. Retrieved from http://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/trump-mental-illness-not-guns-blame-americas-mass-shooting-problem-n437901

Washington Post. (2015, November 28). Mr. Trump's politics of denigration rage on. p. A16.

Weissman, J. (2015, March 25). Disability insurance: America's $124 billion secret welfare program. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/03/disability-insurance-americas-124-billion-secret-welfare-program/274302/

Wentz, B., Jaeger, P. T., & Lazar, J. L. (2011). Retrofitting accessibility: The legal inequality of after-the-fact online access for persons with disabilities in the United States. *First Monday*, *16*, 11-7. Retrieved from http://firstmonday.org/ojs/fm/article/view/3666/3037

Wilson, R. (2014, October 19). Greg Abbott "disappointed" by Wendy Davis's wheelchair ad. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/govbeat/wp/2014/10/19/greg-abbott-disappointed-by-wendy-daviss-wheelchair-ad/