

ON ABLEISM AND ANTHROPOCENTRISM: A CANINE PERSPECTIVE ON THE WORKPLACE INCLUSION OF DISABLED PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

Although scholars have to some extent examined how disabled people become Othered in organizational settings through language, space and practice, and similar analyses have appeared with regard to animals, no analysis so far has focused on the potential double marginalization that takes place when disabled people come to work with their service dog. In filling this void, this paper acknowledges the role socio-materiality plays in creating a social order in which humans and able-bodied people are privileged over non-humans and disabled people. This study documents the in/exclusion of service dogs in the workplace and how it serves as a proxy for the dis/enablement of the owners with mobility and visual impairments, taking a spatial, discursive and affective form. In this way, inclusion and exclusion become materialized through spatial arrangements and artefacts, words and signs, and embodied, emotional performances. Contributions are made towards the literatures on ableism and anthropocentrism in the workplace by illustrating the embodied entanglement of human-dog in the daily organization of work.

INTRODUCTION

Management and organizations, as well as the study thereof, have historically privileged the experiences of humans over non-humans and able-bodied over disabled people. Such marginalization is worrisome considering the co-existence and co-dependence of human and nonhuman animals in many workplaces today (Hamilton & Taylor, 2013; Sayer, 2016), and the fact that disabled people account for one sixth of the global population, making up a large part of the labor force (World Health Organization, 2011). Both anthropocentrism and ableism in research are problematic as they limit the potential of organizations to engage with contemporary problems, thereby replicating and perpetuating binaries that exclude a wide variety of Others. Evidence of such exclusion abounds, with numerous incidents of organizations' animal cruelty on the one hand (Coulter & Fitzgerald, 2019), and statistics on the other hand showing disabled people are only half as often employed on average compared to their able-bodied peers, with little improvement over the years (Geiger, van der Wel & Tøge, 2017; Samoy, 2016).

Recently, critical management scholars have, albeit separately, investigated how anthropocentrism and ableism influence the daily organization of work. Studies on ableism, defined as 'a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human' (Campbell, 2001: 44), have drawn attention to the discursive and/or material practices (e.g. Dobusch, 2017; Holmqvist, Maravelias & Skålen, 2013; Jammaers, Hardonk & Zanoni, 2016; Jammaers, Williams & Zanoni, 2019; Knights & Latham, 2019; Sang, Richards & Marks, 2016; Van Laer, Jammaers & Hoeven, 2020; Williams & Mavin, 2012) through which people are sorted, categorized and labelled either as able-bodied or disabled in the workplace. Inspired by post-structuralism, such lens allows to explore how even despite formal

inclusion of disabled workers through targeted diversity policies, subtle processes persist through which the primacy of able-bodiedness over disability is reaffirmed whilst disabled people become cast as ‘different’ from the norm worker (Jammaers et al., 2019; Mik-Meyer, 2015; Sang et al., 2016).

Studies on anthropocentrism, defined as the pervasive tendency ‘to order the value of lives in a hierarchical manner’ in which ‘inevitably placing ourselves at the top and other beings closer to us in proportion to the resemblance between them and ourselves’ (Singer, 1993: 105 cited in Labatut, Munro & Desmond, 2016) have similarly gained terrain in the study of management and organizations in recent times. Although they remain rare (Dashper, 2020; Labatut et al., 2016), critical studies can be found that investigate organizational contexts in which humans care for or lack care for animals and in which animals are treated as commodity (e.g. Clarke & Knights, 2018; Hamilton & McCabe, 2016; Holloway, Bear & Wilkinson, 2014). Even more rare are studies on organizations in which animals are not key to the business (Wilkin, Fairlie & Ezzedeen, 2016; O’Doherty, 2016). Dogs especially have been at the center of making up the subject of such inquiry, for instance by looking at therapy dogs in hospitals (Knisely, Barker & Barker, 2012) or on campus (Charles & Wolkowitz, 2019), and as narcotics, explosives or victims detectors in law enforcement (Cunha, Rego, & Munro, 2019). Dogs thus provide humans, and humans provide dogs with ‘significant otherness’ (Skoglund & Redmalm, 2016) in a wide variety of organizational settings.

In this study, we focus specifically on the in/exclusion of service dogs owned by disabled people in the workplace. A recent review on assistance animals at work revealed the great importance of such animals to their owners, yet found that the organizational support of canine presence could be endangered by allergies, phobias and workflow disruptions (Hunter, Verreynne, Pachanaa & Harpur, 2019). We aim to ‘dig deeper’ and follow recent claims that dominance of humans over animals and their relegation to inferior other is analogue to the way humans repress other humans that are deemed ‘too’ different (Clarke & Knights, 2018; Taylor & Fraser, 2019). Through interviews, photographs and observations of eight disabled employee-service dog pairs in different workplaces (see Table1), we want to outline how the rendering of certain humans as inferior humans (ableism) works in the same way as the rendering of animals as inferior to humans (anthropocentrism). This study aims to further analyze the way these -isms are intertwined in the workplace to shape power inequalities in an attempt to ‘challenge unhelpful binaries’ (Sayers, Hamilton & Sang, 2019). In doing so, it contributes a socio-material perspective of human-non human entanglement to existing studies of ableism in the workplace, highlighting the subtle workings of ableist normativity. In addition, it adds to debates on anthropocentrism in organizations by showing the conditional and interconnected acceptance of legally included animals in the workplace.

Table 1 about here¹

FINDINGS

In the first part of the findings, focus goes out to the co-constructed embodied subjectivity of the respondents and the idea is presented that inclusion or exclusion of the dog was a proxy for inclusion or exclusion of a disabled co-worker. In the second part of the findings, the spatial,

discursive and affective forms of inclusion and exclusion of the dog, and by extension the person, are outlined.

Embodied entanglement of human-dog in the workplace

The idea of entanglement came to the surface on numerous occasions, when participants explained the importance of their dogs for their wellbeing and feelings of wholeness, as many expressed their dog was their '*independence*' (Oliver), '*best friend*' (Wendy), '*a part of themselves*' (Natasha), who made them '*feel safe*' (Hannah) and whiteout whom they '*would be nothing*' (Mary) or '*completely lost and useless*' (Megan). But also for career progression, the presence of a dog was essential as shown by Patrick who explains how '*There are projects to run, companies to talk to, fairs to attend abroad. I am constantly on the move. It would normally not be an ideal job for a blind person but the dog makes all the difference*'. Moreover, against expectations, the issues with allergies, phobias or religious sensitivities was downplayed by all respondents. For instance as Natasha recounts about a superior for whom she worked occasionally '*And she used to take a [...] anti-allergy pill. If she did not, she would not manage to work in the same office as me, but she did not mind so it was fine.*' While Hannah explains how colleagues who were scared of dogs before Hippos' arrival '*learned to appreciate his presence*', and in one case even went on '*to buy a dog for herself*'.

Rather, it seemed as if the people who were exclusionary towards the dog were already not so inclusive towards the dog owner to begin with. Therefore, it seems adequate to conclude that exclusionary behavior of others towards the service dog, who was integral to their owners' understanding of the self (Haraway, 2003) and enabled them to get to work and be independent at work, was somehow connected to ableist inscriptions which labelled disabled employees as 'out of place' in the workplace.

Spatial, discursive and affective inclusion and exclusion of dogs in the workplace

First of all, concerning the space dogs were allowed to take up, a great variety between organizations was noticeable. Spatial restrictions were the result of unwritten organizational policies and socialization, characteristics of the built environment (e.g. type of office such as cellular, open plan or activity-based), but also of the preferences of dog owners and their prior trainers. The 'dog zoning' at one of the organizations under study, TeleCorp, through the use of artefacts like the cage or the leash created a clear hierarchy of beings in the workplace. Unlike the cases where dogs freely dwell the office together with the other human colleagues, aesthetic decisions here 'form symbolic boundaries that become a key mechanism in the perpetuation of social inequality' (Wasserman, 2019: 18).

Secondly, dogs in the workplaces under study were also included and excluded through language and signs, or broadly speaking 'discourse'. Sometimes, comments from co-workers clearly expressed how non-human needs were seen as inferior to superior human ones. Moreover, dog acceptance in the workplace was conditional and required a relation to human organizing as passive object that complies. On occasion, any signs of agency or failure of domestication by humans (e.g. barking, pooping and licking) made their rightful presence questionable. Yet the comments and discursive practices of others at other times also revealed a broad acceptance of the dog as full member of the organization and a break away from anthropocentrism and ableism (e.g. dog retirement parties).

Thirdly, affective inclusion and exclusion of the dog was noticeable through the interviews and observations. Such affect was expressed at the corporeal level, by colleagues kneeling down to pet and hug the dog or taking a step back, and beyond the corporeal level, by addressing the dog through ‘babytalk’ or a simple ‘good morning’. Both the use of touch and voice and the absence thereof could be interpreted as a sign of accepting the dog-owner pair, and a sign of defying the owner’s agency in case the owner specifically had requested for others not to caress or approach their companions. It should however be noted that sometimes the denial of affect was more informed by anthropocentrism than by ableism, and so these two –isms, although often related, were not necessarily aligned.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals how inclusion and exclusion of disabled people can occur ‘by proxy’, through their non-human companion, and in this way informs current scholarship interested in disability and employment, revealing subtle forms of discrimination through a socio-material lens (Dale & Latham, 2015; Knights & Latham, 2019). Such discrimination stems from deeply ingrained assumptions of ableism and anthropocentrism through which the dominance of humans over animals and able-bodied over disabled people becomes taken-for-granted and their relegation to inferior Other normalized. Unlike Hunter and colleagues (2019), this paper thus advocates for an understanding of exclusion that moves beyond organizational concerns for allergies, phobias and workflow disruptions and is centered on unhelpful binaries that ‘reach into the caverns of collective subjectivity’ (Campbell, 2009: 166).

First of all, the spatial dynamics of inclusion and exclusion of dogs in the workplace took the form of formal, legally ordained inclusion into the building. However, what happened passed the entry door for each dog-owner pair was quite different. This we argue, depended on owners’ preference and office type (from cellular to activity-based offices) to some extent, but more importantly organizational variations of ableist and anthropocentric beliefs. Our study contributes to recent accounts on the ‘doing of dis/ability’ in the workplace (Van Laer et al., 2020) in analogue with more advanced notions of the doing of gender through architecture, spatial arrangement and artifacts (e.g. Dale & Burrell, 2011; Hirst & Schwabland, 2018; Wasserman, 2019; Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015). We follow critical scholars and refuse to see space as neutral container of activities, but rather highlight their relation to processes of power and control (Clegg & Kornberger, 2006) and consider how organizational decisions on the spatial uptake of dogs perpetuate social inequality. Our study adds an anthropocentric lens to existing studies that show how human-centric organization-specific power relations are materialized through architecture, artifacts and spatial arrangements (Dale, 2005; Dale & Burrell, 2008; Zhang & Spicer, 2014) taking into account how non-humans too are spatially designated as undesirable Other through dog-zoning.

Secondly, albeit research on the discursive inclusion and exclusion of disabled people has made some way in recent years (e.g., Dobusch, 2017; Holmqvist et al., 2013; Jammaers et al., 2016), the canine perspective developed here gives a sense of more subtle or indirect form of discrimination towards humans’ significant non-human others, which is unprecedented. The expression of comments that seem innocent, unintentional and harmless such as about acceptable dog behavior in the workplace (e.g. barking) might be ‘entrenched in common, everyday interactions’ and subtle in its manifestation as they do not address the person directly, yet could potentially have effects that are ‘not so subtle’ (Van Laer & Janssens, 2011: 1205) on a person’s

emotional wellbeing due to the unique embodied entanglement of human-dog in the workplace. Different from studies where animals are central to organizing (e.g. Baran et al., 2016; Clarke & Knights; 2018; Coulter & Fitzgerald, 2019; Dashper, 2020; Hamilton & Taylor, 2012; Hamilton & McCabe, 2016; Holloway et al., 2014), our study aligns more closely to the remarkable study by O'Doherty (2016). In the cases under study, animal presence is also unexpected yet similarly gives rise to a 'multi-species becoming' (O'Doherty, 2016, 423) in which humans and non-human construct the social realities of the workplace together. Processes of discursive othering of disabled employees (Jammaers et al., 2016; Mik-Meyer, 2015; 2016) became both weakened and strengthened by canine presence, as some respondents believed others saw them as even more childlike and less professional because they brought along a 'companion' animal, whereas for other respondents the dog helped 'humanize' them and resolve the distance and awkwardness around their disability. Although further research is required, this seemed to be divided along gendered lines. Arguably, discourses on gender created meaningful intersections, and this was also noticeable through the way male and female participants represented their embodied human-dog entanglement somewhat differently to the interviewer. Indeed, gender influenced the way respondents situated their relation to their dog (Satama & Huopainen, 2019), with male participants presenting their dog as more 'replaceable' and less integral to their identity, more naturally reproducing the idea of moral anthropocentrism (Clarke & Knights, 2018)

Thirdly, through the focus on affective forms of inclusion and exclusion, this study takes into account the affective dimensions of negotiating dog-human companionship in the workplace. Until hitherto, affect as an important aspect in the discrimination of disabled people was missing, with priority being paid to psychological processes of stereotyping and discrimination (Beatty et al., 2019; Stone & Colella, 1996) and material barriers (Barnes & Mercer, 2005; Foster & Wass, 2013). Some have noted how this neglect of affective aspects of disability is problematic (Goodley, 2014; Goodley, Liddiard & Runswick-Cole, 2018; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2011; Reeve, 2002, 2006; Watermeyer, 2012). Others' display of affect towards the dog, is never simply the result of 'being a dog lover', but tells us how animals and disabled people are situated within a specific socio-cultural space (Goodley, 2014). Unlike prior survey-based research that concludes that dogs in general solicit positive feelings in co-workers in the workplace (Charles & Wolkowitz, 2019), our account offers a deeper understanding of the way Others affect and are affected by a complex socio-political constellation (Goodley et al., 2018) and how such affect takes the form of a bodily state (e.g., excitement, disgust, pride, shame) that often 'escapes discursive capture and naming' (Fotaki, Kenny & Vachhani, 2017: 4). To end on a more positive note, the pleasant and sometimes unexpected experiences of affect encountered across these organizations could be interpreted as movements towards what Pullen and Rhodes (2015) have termed 'ways of organizational life that resist domination and oppression in favour of the enactment of care and respect for difference as it is lived and experienced' (159).

ENDNOTES

1. The graphics in table 1 are the art work of Benoît Raucent, director of the Louvain Learning Lab at Université Catholique de Louvain.

REFERENCES AVAILABLE FROM THE AUTHOR

Table 1. Overview of respondents¹

 Millie & Mary (50, F) work in a traditional, medium-sized open plan office (shared by 12 people), as call-center operator for TeleCorp (telecom services) with a visual impairment	 Nacho & Natasha (42, F) work in shared-room of 3 people as lecturer for CityCollege (higher education) with a mobility impairment	 Oreo & Owen (40, M) work in traditional, large open-plan office (shared by over 24 people) as archivist for RadioX (television and radio services) with a visual impairment	 Mousch & Megan (47, F) work in activity-based flex office (shared by over 24 people) as administrative worker for TeleCorp (telecom services) with visual impairment
 Oscar & Oliver (40, M) work in a traditional, large open-plan office (shared by over 24 people), as ICT helpdesk for EmployOrg (employment mediation services) with visual impairment	 Hippos & Hannah (31, F) work in shared-room of 2 people as medical management assistant for Hospi (hospital services) with Osteogenesis imperfecta	 Witse & Wendy (50, F) work in traditional, small open office (shared by 4 people) as management assistant for CountyGov (governance of local region) with visual impairment	 Patch & Patrick (45, M) work in single cell-office (and regularly from home or on client sites) as senior business manager for UniSpinoff (pharmaceutical industry) with visual impairment