Ouch!:
An examination of the self representation of disabled people on a BBC website

By Estelle Thoreau
DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA in Journalism Studies.

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This dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise state. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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For Stanley Le Brocq and Vic Thoreau
Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been possible without the help of the following people: my family (for their support from afar), the late Stanley Le Brocq, Professor Jenny Kitzinger (for her endless patience while supervising), Cartref (for providing me with employment to help fund my studies) and Aaron.
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1.0 ABSTRACT

The study of the representation of disabled people in mainstream media is of interest to academics in the field of disability studies. This is because the way in which disabled people are represented can both reflect and influence attitudes towards them. However, most of the research in this field focuses on critiquing the mainstream media, thus neglecting how disabled people choose to represent themselves within the media. This dissertation attempts to redress the situation. It analyses the representation of disability by disabled people on Ouch, a BBC web magazine produced largely by disabled people. Through a mixture of content and critical discourse analysis, the dissertation analyses how disabled people are represented within the articles on the website, how ideology and power is expressed through the discourse on Ouch, and how the medium of the internet has influenced the content of the website. The findings reveal that Ouch offers a significantly different type of representation than that offered by the mainstream media. Within the sample, disabled people are described using informal terms, humour and often irony. Disabled people are represented as active, vocal people with diverse interests and opinions. While disabled people are not represented as ‘official’ through the use of job titles, they are instead positioned as experts through their experience of disability. The ownership and staffing of the website is found to have made a direct impact on the style and content of Ouch articles. This occurs through its positive representation of disability and its promotion of entertainment-based articles. The medium of the internet is also found to have influenced the style and content of Ouch. It has resulted in an increased sense of community towards its audience, and a prevalence of personal narrative and orality within its articles.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 The topic

My dissertation topic is the self-representation of disabled people in the media. Within this, I will study the content of www.bbc.co.uk/ouch, a BBC website about disability produced largely by disabled people. I hope that using critical discourse analysis and content analysis to examine the content of the website Ouch¹ will offer up a better understanding of both how disabled people choose to represent themselves, and the role that the internet might play in this process.

2.2 The history of my dissertation topic

My decision to study the content of the website Ouch has been influenced by a number of factors including:

- the changing state of societal attitudes towards disability;

¹ While the website’s name is ‘Ouch!’’, from here on in this dissertation it will be referred to as ‘Ouch’.
• a desire to see how disabled people choose to represent themselves in the media when they are given the chance to do so;
• the growing influence of the medium of the internet; and
• my personal experience of disability.

2.2.1 Changing attitudes toward disability
Within the United Kingdom (UK), societal attitudes towards disabled people are currently in a state of change. Legally, the situation is improving, albeit slowly. Since 1996, the rollout of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 has boosted legal rights for disabled people\(^2\). The final part of the Act, which concerns disabled people’s access to goods and services, comes into force in October 2004. Alongside these changes, it appears there is also a small but increasing awareness that disabled people have been represented incorrectly in the mainstream media. Within the press, language used to refer to disabled people is beginning to change. Terms like ‘handicapped’, ‘mong’ and ‘cripple’ are now generally accepted as being offensive and are not often used. However, despite these improvements there is still a long way to go before disabled people are accorded the same rights and representation as non-disabled people in the UK. With regards to my dissertation, I decided that I wanted to investigate the representation of disabled people within the British media against this background of change.

2.2.2 Focusing on the positive
During a preliminary literature search, many of the studies which I found focused on critiquing the mainstream representation of disability. Recommendations from these studies often centred around negative representations – critiquing mainstream media practices and advising journalists about what not to do when writing about disabled people. I decided I would prefer to investigate the representation of disability from a more positive and disability-centred standpoint. Enough of critiquing non-disabled people! I wanted to analyse how disabled people choose to represent themselves in the media when they are given the chance to do so.

2.2.3 Background to Ouch

While searching for instances of disabled people representing themselves in the media I came across the website www.bbc.co.uk/ouch. Ouch offers something very different with regards to the representation of disabled people in the media, more specifically the internet. In Britain there are a number of disability-focused websites which are sponsored by different companies including charities, government agencies, universities and research institutions. The majority of these websites tend to be information centred, and charity or advocacy based. Not only is Ouch a website funded by a major media organisation but its content has been structured in a non-political web-magazine style. It states that it aims not to provide information, but to:

reflect experiences, thoughts and give alternative slants on all things big and small that are important to disabled people. We recognise that disabled people have been upset at the way they've been portrayed over the years, so we're hoping to obliterate the preciousness and downright weirdness of some portrayals and tap into reality (http://www.bbc.co.uk/ouch/about/).

The BBC’s decision to staff Ouch with disabled people and operate a largely hands-off policy in regards to the management of content (Matheson 2003) gives disabled people the opportunity to represent themselves in a different ways from that of most mainstream media.

2.2.4 A twist in the tale

Furthermore, the fact that Ouch is produced as a web magazine put a further twist on its representation of disability. Increasingly, the internet is being touted as a technology which will either contribute towards the downfall of society (Barnes 2001, p.208) or its saviour through the removal of social inequalities (Trend 2001, p.251). With this in mind, I decided that I wanted to examine how the medium of the internet has influenced the representation of disability on Ouch, if at all.

2.2.5 A personal contribution

On a personal note, chronic illness during my teenage years has made me particularly aware of media representation and image. During this time, I found that my illness had transformed

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3 See Appendix 1 – Ouch job specification.
4 See Appendix 4.
me into someone I could not recognise in the media. Indeed, the image reflected back was inaccurate. The topic of this dissertation is therefore chosen to contribute something towards my own knowledge of the origins of this representation. Furthermore, it should also be noted that this dissertation is written from the perspective of someone who has been both impaired through illness, and disabled by society.

2.3 The research issues
As a result of the above influences, the aim of my dissertation is to examine how disabled people represent both themselves and non-disabled society when given the opportunity to do so by a major media organisation, in this case the BBC. In analysing articles from the website Ouch, this research aims to address three main questions:

- How are disabled people represented on the BBC website Ouch?
- What type of ideology and power structure is evident in the discourse used in articles on Ouch?
- How has the medium of the internet influenced the content of Ouch?

2.4 The structure of the dissertation
This dissertation is organised into five main sections. The introduction (chapter two) introduces my topic and area of investigation, outlines my reasons behind this choice, and presents the three main research questions. The literature review (chapter three) examines the literature with regard to my topic. It includes discussion of disability theory and politics, debates about language, and an examination of the influence of the internet. Three studies of the media representation of disability are examined, before the role of the disabled audience is examined in brief. The influence of the new media with regards to disabled people is investigated. My research methodology is outlined in chapter four. It examines the main theories behind content and critical discourse analysis, and also sets out the criteria behind selection of a sample of articles from Ouch. Chapter five contains my analysis and findings and, as such, makes up the core of this dissertation. Findings from content analysis and critical discourse analysis are analysed. Findings from an in-depth analysis of two articles from my sample are also discussed. Chapter six focuses on my discussion and conclusion. It applies the findings from my analysis and findings to the issues raised within the introduction.
and literature review. These issues include: what makes the contents of Ouch different, the role of the social model within the representation of disability, and the influence of the medium of the internet. This chapter also includes methodological and personal reflections, before then summing up the dissertation and its findings.

2.5 Summary
This chapter has introduced the topic of my dissertation. It explains the history behind my choice of topic, including: a change in societal perceptions attitudes towards disabled people; a desire to present a positive analysis of the representation of disabled people; the discovery of the website Ouch; the growing influence of the internet; and my own personal experience of disability. This chapter also states my three main research questions and outlines the structure of the dissertation. My next chapter reviews the literature relevant to my topic.
3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

In the search for literature on my dissertation topic, I have been unable to find much which is about the exact topic I am examining – namely the representation of disabled people by disabled people on the internet. It is however important to locate this study in the broader field of study. Therefore, this literature review has been split into five parts:

• a brief examination of the main theories of disability studies;
• an examination of debate about language;
• an analysis of several studies on the representation of disability in the media;
• a brief examination of how disabled people view their representation; and
• a discussion about the impact of the technology of the internet on the representation of disability.

3.1.2 Key terms

Before I begin to examine the literature, a number of key terms need to be noted. Firstly, within this dissertation the terms *impairment* and *disability* are taken to mean the definitions given by the Disabled People’s International. These are as follows:

Impairment is the functional limitation with the individual caused by physical, mental, or sensory impairment.

Disability is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers. (in Fougeyrollas and Beauregard 2001, p.177)

Secondly, Albrecht, Seelman and Bury (2001, p.3) identify two main ways of referring to disability which have been put forward by the disability movement. These labels reflect Western cultural perceptions of disability. The first, ‘person with a disability’, puts the person first in order to emphasise the importance of the individual. This definition is largely used in the USA. The second, ‘disabled person’ – i.e. society disables the person - emphasises disability as a minority group and thus their oppression by mainstream society. Within the United Kingdom, this second term is most often used (Albrecht, Seelman and Bury, 2001, p.3). This usage reflects the perception that disability is a result of discrimination on behalf of mainstream society. Because my study involves media in the UK, every effort has been made to use the second term throughout this dissertation.
3.2 Disability theory and politics

Within the UK, there are two main approaches to the study of disability: the medical model and the socio-political model.

3.2.1 The medical model

Barnes (1997) defines the medical model as the idea of disability as sickness, impairment or deviation from normality. Within this, disability is viewed both as a medical issue and also a personal one (Abberley 1997b; Campbell 1990; Johnston 1997; Barnes 2003, pp.2-4; Shakespeare 1996). From this perspective, impairment is seen as something that needs to be fixed, with the responsibility for this fix resting on the individual who is impaired. However, the medical model has been criticised because of its assumption that impairment equals an individual’s loss. This approach is seen to depoliticise disability (Goggin and Newell 2003, p.23) as it apportions responsibility for disability on to the affected individual.

3.2.2 The social model

Today, the most widely accepted approach towards disability amongst theorists of disability is the social model. This challenge to the prevailing medical model of disability in the UK can be linked to the rise of the disability movement in the late 1960s, in particular the founding of the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation – UPIAS. After the birth of UPIAS, disabled people began to vocalise their dissatisfaction with how they were being portrayed in the media and called for more appropriate language and better representation of disability (Barnes 1993, p.8).

The social model defines disability as the environmental and social barriers imposed on disabled people by non-disabled society which limit or remove altogether opportunities to take part in community life (Altman 2001, p.103; Oliver in Williams 2001, p.135). This approach is reflected in the subsequent politicisation of disability by people with disabilities

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5 There is no page number on this quote as the book is out of print and is only available online. Therefore, when the book is referenced in this essay, each online chapter has been listed separately, and an online web address provided in the bibliography.
(British Council of Disabled People; Barnes 1997; Abberley 1997b; Liggett 1997; Barnes 2003; Shakespeare 1996). The social model views disability as a source of inequality in the same way as class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality are. It argues that struggle is needed to improve quality of life and position within society for disabled people. The social model also claims it is partially responsible for the formation of a disability culture. One example of this is sign language which is beginning to be promoted and defended as a minority language to be preserved and respected as part of a minority culture.

However, the social model has its limitations. Williams (2001, pp.135-136) argues that disability cannot be seen as solely a result of social oppression for three reasons. He states that, firstly, unlike gender or ethnicity, disability as a result of chronic illness emerges slowly over time. Secondly, as someone is able-bodied is only temporarily - most of us will become disabled in some form before we die - disability is a category open to everyone. Finally, Williams comments that disability at some level is not just about oppression but also about bodily pain or discomfort. Corker and French (2002, p.4) note that as the definition of disability relies on impairment, the social model cannot be understood without the medical model. A further critique is that it conceptualises the social construction of disability as happening to disabled people. This once again defines them as members of a social group who are acted upon (Gabel 2002, pp.38-39).

3.2.3 The social constructionist perspective
Medical and social models aside, disability can be considered a social construct with changing social and political meaning. The history of disability in the western world is too complex to be examined in any great depth within this dissertation. Braddock and Parish (2001, pp.11-68) trace the history of impairment back to prehistoric times, through references in the Old Testament, in Ancient Greece and Rome, to its ‘demonological’ roots in the Middle Ages, and the introduction of asylums for ‘idiots, blinds and cripples’ in England in the 1700s. Their examination of history continues to include the freak shows of the mid to late 19th century, the rise of charity organisations in the 20th century, the beginning of the de-

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6 Being gay could also be described in this way.
institutionalisation of disabled people, the rise of the disability rights movement, and the enshrinement of anti-discrimination rights within the legal system.

Within the UK, scholars argue that the construction of disability - not impairment - is a result of the capitalist boom post-World War II (Wolfensberger in Barnes 1997; Finkelstein in Barnes 1997; Hunt in Barnes 1997). Wolfensberger argues that the UK’s post-primary production economy has to create large numbers of dependent and devalued people in order to maintain employment for others (in Barnes 1997). Paul Hunt views the relationship between material considerations and cultural perceptions as vital in understanding the experience of impairment and disability (Hunt in Barnes 1997). He argues that as a result of the centrality of work within Western culture, people with impairments are viewed as useless as they are seen as unable to contribute economically to society (Hunt in Barnes 1997).

### 3.3 Debates about language

However, it more than just societal attitudes which influence people’s perception of disability. Fairclough (2001) links language use with power and ideology, making language both a social process and also part of society (Fairclough 2001, p.19). Certainly language plays a significant part in the production, maintenance, and change of social relations of power. The same can also be said in regard to visual images. This is because contained within language and images are supposed common-sense assumptions and ideology relating to the dominant groups in society (Fairclough 2001, p.1-2). With regard to print-based media, Barnes argues that the representation of disability depends largely on language usage (Barnes 1993, p.8). As a result, stereotypical beliefs about disabled people are only inherent to our culture through language and its structure. These assumptions also persist partly because they are reproduced through the communications media (Barnes 1992). Barnes argues these labels tend to be imposed, not chosen (Barnes 2003, p.12). When appropriate terminology is used it can provide disabled people with a sense of individual and collective identity, while reminding non-disabled people of society’s continuing oppression of people with disabilities (Barnes 1993, p.8).
3.3.1 The reasons behind the representation of disabled people

In examining the representation of disabled people in the media, it is also important to examine the cause behind this imagery. Mitchell and Snyder (2001, p.196) suggest two main historical modes as being responsible for the representation of disability. Firstly, overheated symbolic imagery, and secondly, disability as a tool of artistic representation. Shakespeare (1997) argues that one cause of the negative representation of disabled people could be able-bodied society projecting their fear of death and unease of physicality onto them. He notes that as disabled people are seen as representing different aspects of human existence:

Disabled people are scapegoats. It is not just that disabled people are different, expensive, inconvenient or odd: it is that they represent a threat – either to order, or, to the self-conception of western human beings, who, since the Enlightenment, have viewed themselves as perfectible, as all-knowing, as god-like (Shakespeare 1997).  

3.3.2 Attempts to alter the language of disability

Within the disability rights movement in Britain there has been a concerted effort to alter the language and codes used to refer to disabled people in the media. However, this has met with limited success. Where disability-neutral language has begun to be implemented, Barnes (1993, p.8) argues it is often done in a way that undermines its intended new meaning. For example, the new terms are often referred to as political correctness out-of-control, or a variety of terms put forward so as to confuse writers and readers (Barnes 1993, p.8). In addition, while the request to not define people wholly by their disability has been largely accepted, language is still used in a way that acknowledges personhood while still defining by disability.

It could be argued that language usage is also related to production process, a point made in Sweeney’s study of radio (2003) and in Sancho’s study of television (Sancho 2003). Sweeney argues that the mainstreaming of disabled content on BBC Radio 4 has resulted in a reduction of “regular in-depth treatment of complex and profound disability issues” (Sweeney 2003, p153) and the weakening of the status of disabled people as social group

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7 There is no page number here as the book is out of print and is only available online. A web address is provided in the bibliography - this quote can be found on page 21 of the online chapter.
8 For example, the cripple.
9 For example, she suffers from cerebral palsy.
Sancho advocates the increased employment of disabled people in the media in order to improve the media representation of disabled people. My study of the website Ouch which is produced by disabled people, also aims to address these issues. In particular, it asks:

- How has the employment of disabled people influenced the content of articles on Ouch?
- Does Ouch escape from or transcend the problems identified in studies of the mass media?
- How do the producers and contributors to Ouch use language on the site?

More recently, a change in representation of disability is starting to occur through disabled people altering the meaning of language already in use (Mitchell and Snyder 2001, p.208; Corbett 1997). Mitchell and Snyder (2001, p.209) argue that this adoption of stereotypical terminology by disabled people is turning the meaning back on non-disabled society, forcing the dominant culture to face its inaccurate discourse head-on. This reclaiming of language is used throughout Ouch. For example, the site’s weblog is called Crippled Monkey\(^{10}\), and the Christmas 2003 editorial has the Editor using the following terms to refer to himself: lame blindie, someone clearly diseased-up, freaky leg-dragging blindie, and inexplicable cripple.

### 3.4 Studies of media representation

Before I begin to discuss these studies, the following point should be noted. As disability as set out by the social model is a social construct, it follows on that language and representation of disability is likely to vary across different societies and cultures (Corker 2002, p.193). One example of this is Auslander and Gold’s content analysis of Canadian and Israeli press (Auslander and Gold 1999) which notes that the compact structure of Hebrew language and the importance of children in the Israeli culture influence how disabled people are represented in newspaper coverage\(^{11}\). Time may also influence the representation of

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\(^{10}\) This was the case at the time of the sample. Since then, the site has undergone some changes, and the weblog is presented as a ‘Weblog’ which is written by Crippled Monkey.

\(^{11}\) Auslander and Gold (1999) found that while there are similarities in language usage across both countries, there are also differences. Israeli journalists tended to write about disabled children using correct terminology. Canadian journalists tended to be “most careful, language wise” within articles that had a progressive disability rights perspective.
disability. For example, Stone examines the role that modern and traditional Chinese script plays in the representation of disability with Chinese society\textsuperscript{12} (Stone 2002). Taking this factors into account, in order to provide an accurate portrayal of disability representation in the UK, every effort has been made throughout this literature review to refer to UK-based studies of language.

In the following section I outline three studies. These are as follows:

- *Disabling Imagery and the Media* (Barnes 1992), which uses secondary content analysis research to examine the representation of disabled people within UK media;
- *Stop Press!* (Cooke, Daone and Morris 2000), a content analysis study of how the UK press portrays disabled people;
- *Content analysis 1997-2002: Representation of Disabled People on Terrestrial Television*\textsuperscript{13} (in Sancho 2003), a short report which uses content analysis to examine the representation and portrayal of disabled people on terrestrial television in the UK.

### 3.4.1 Disabling Imagery and the Media

The report *Disabling Imagery and the Media* based its findings on a detailed content analysis of previous research in the field, contributions from disability organisations, media organisations, and advertisers (Barnes 1992). The report finds 11 common recurring stereotypes within UK media. These are as follows:

- the disabled person as pitiable and pathetic,
- the disabled person as an object of violence,
- the disabled person as sinister and evil,
- the disabled person as atmosphere or curio,
- the disabled person as super cripple,
- the disabled person as their own worst and only enemy,

\textsuperscript{12} Stone (2003, p.146) finds that ancient Chinese characters play a role in communicating and reinforcing dominant concepts and perceptions of impairment and disability. She argues that new terms for disability which are coming into use in China reflect both acceptable discourses of disability from the West and also changing attitudes amongst Chinese people towards disability (Stone 2003, pp.145-147).

\textsuperscript{13} This monitoring exercise was undertaken by the Communications Research Group in Birmingham.
• the disabled person as burden,
• the disabled person as sexually abnormal,
• the disabled person as incapable of participating fully in community life,
• the disabled person as normal.

However, its findings need to be qualified by several points. Firstly, it did not undertake its own research, instead drawing on the results of others’ research. This both strengthens the report through providing an overview of research findings, while also weakening the findings, as these reports could use different or overlapping methodology, making the individual results not comparable. Furthermore, the report notes that it deals with the media as whole – an ambitious aim for a small report. Its statement that its findings draw on “a detailed content analysis of previous research in the field” (Barnes 1992, p.4) appears to ignore analysis of sound or images. Given the date of the report in relation to the development of the internet, it is understandable why there is no reference to online media in the report.

3.4.2 Stop Press!
The study Stop Press! uses content analysis to examine national and local newspapers in the UK for coverage of disability. It finds that stories relating to disabled people tend to examine issues of medical research, medical negligence and court cases more often than other issues (Cooke, Daone and Morris 2000). The study concludes that in local papers, fundraising initiatives by or for disabled people is the most popular topic. These stories either featured disabled people overcoming all odds to raise money for a worthy cause, or portrayed disabled people as being reliant on charity. The study finds little information within these articles as to why disabled people and their families are forced to fundraise for essential services or equipment. Furthermore, it also found that disabled people are often described using outdated stereotypes, and that journalists are still making negative assumptions about disabled people and their lives (Cooke, Daone and Morris 2000, p.4).

Stop Press! recommends that journalists try to use language which depicts disabled people as active individuals with control over their own lives, instead of using terms which represent
them as passive victims. It recommends terms such as disabled person, instead of cripple or invalid, or referring to someone as a wheelchair user instead of confined to a wheelchair or wheelchair-bound. However, it should be noted that as the study uses content analysis to analyse representation, it is not able to consider the changing meaning of words, contested word meanings or the reclamation of previously offensive terminology. For example, it would not be able to differentiate whether the term ‘cripple’ is being used as per its original meaning\textsuperscript{14} or if it was being used in an ironic manner.

3.4.3 Representation of Disabled People on Terrestrial Television

The short report Content analysis 1997-2002: Representation of Disabled People on Terrestrial Television (Sancho 2003) finds that the representation of disability in British television has remained stable since 1999 at around 11 per cent of programmes, with disabled people accounting for one per cent of the speaking population in the programmes (Sancho 2003, p.98). Overall, disabled people are more likely to be portrayed in fiction and factual television programmes, followed by news broadcasts and films (Sancho 2003, p.99). In relation to my dissertation, it should be noted that this report only counts instances of representation. It does not analyse the quality of these representations.

3.5 A brief look at the audience

Media representations of disability do not occur in a vacuum. That is, media content is not unquestioningly and uncritically accepted by those who view them. In analysing the representation of disability in the media, I will also briefly examine how disabled people interpret media content. Karen Ross’ study But where’s me in it? examines disabled viewers’ attitudes and perceptions towards disability and disability themes as portrayed through broadcast media. In the report, Ross finds that participants in the study are very critical of how disabled characters are featured in mainstream programmes (Ross 1997, p.670). Major themes which dominate their criticism are as follows:

- The largely ‘negative’ or stereotypical way that disability features in popular dramas and soaps
- The restricted repertoire of character types

\textsuperscript{14} This would be seen as offensive by many disabled people.
• The marginalisation of disability as a theme in programme narratives
• The infantilization of disabled people
• The persistent use of the wheelchair as an icon for disability
• Non-disabled actors playing disabled characters
• Unrealistic or sanitised representation of disability
• That writers and programme makers make assumptions about what the mainstream audience will tolerate with regards to disability
• The impact that disability portrayals can have on a mainstream non-disabled audience

While Ross acknowledges that these criticisms of broadcast media are both many and wide-ranging, she sees the issues raised as correctable by broadcasters (Ross 1997, p.676). Ross notes that the majority of the criticisms involve respect issues. These include respecting and portraying the diversity of disability, respecting the views of disabled people and consulting with them to provide a better representation, respecting the abilities of disabled people, and actively involving disabled media professionals in all aspects of programme production (Ross 1997, p.676). Within this dissertation, I aim to relate the audience criticisms presented in Ross’s report to the content of articles in my sample of Ouch.

3.6 Influence of the new media
Analysing discourse on the internet is complicated as the medium is constantly evolving. In addition, the examination of the discourse of disability on the internet is rarely researched (Goggin and Newell 2003, p.115). What makes the task even more difficult is that the web can be considered both an engine of social change which influences societal beliefs and behaviours (Jones 1999b, p.2; Hine 2000, p.9), and also a product of culture which reflects societal beliefs and behaviours (Hine 2000, p.9). However, with regards to the impact of internet technology on disabled people, two overall viewpoints are emerging: positive versus negative.

3.6.1 A positive influence?
On the one hand, the internet is often lauded as a development which has numerous positive spin-offs for disabled people. Some of the Web’s supposed revolutionary attributes are: its
ability to link people regardless of distance and time, the opportunity for disabled people to communicate ‘online’ and be viewed the same as non-disabled internet users (Bowker and Tuffin 2003), and increased access to information (Williamson, Wright, Schauder and Bow 2001). Internet and email are also seen as tools which allow disabled people to directly take part in advocacy and social change (Blasiotti, Westbrook and Kobayashi 2001, p338). Furthermore, the ease of publishing on the internet also means that disability culture can flourish (Goggin and Newell 2003, p.134)\(^\text{15}\) through its ability to link disabled individuals irrespective of location and mobility levels.

3.6.2 Legitimising oppression?
However, a number of scholars argue that the reality of the internet may not be as emancipatory for disabled people as it has been claimed. Goggin and Newell (2003, p.9) argue that many digital technological systems could be seen as serving the predominantly non-disabled status quo in ways which maintain and legitimize the oppression of disabled people. While the internet may offer many disabled people the chance to communicate with others without the need to disclose their disability, the internet’s ability to use text, graphics, animation, video and audio also has the possibility of excluding them (Goggin and Newell 2003, p.11; Williamson, Wright, Schauder and Bow 2001). Website designers need to be aware that non-text forms of communication could be accompanied by alternative formats to communicate the same information in order to maximise the site’s accessibility (Blasiotti, Westbrook and Kobayashi 2001, p.338). Goggin and Newell also state that the lack of representation of disabled people in positions of power or authority on information super-highway policy boards means that the digital gap between the have and the have-nots will continue to widen (2003, p.70).

3.6.3 The medium and the message
The nature of the medium of the internet may also have a bearing on its content. Marshall McLuhan argues that the medium of a media influences the content that it produces (McLuhan 1995, p.225). Running alongside McLuhan’s theory is the idea that people’s self

\(^{15}\) Sourbati’s study of internet access for older people found that those people who are keen to access the internet see the new technology as enabling them to engage in new forms of leisure, meet new people, and stay in contact with modern society (Sourbati 2004, p.29).
representation depends on the situation or place they find themselves in (Meyrowitz 1985, p.27). In addition to this, Mark Poster (1995) argues that the rise of the internet has seen a proliferation of narrative and story telling online. This, he says, is largely due to the fact that unlike other previous media technologies, the internet is cheap, flexible, easily available and quick. In examining the content and language used in the website Ouch, it could be argued that its unique content would not exist if it were not for the technology it uses. Furthermore, as the BBC’s remit is for audience share and not commercial success, providing a website on disability is an inexpensive way of producing content for a sector of society not seen as a particularly cash-rich market for advertisers. The fluidity of content alteration online also means that the site’s producers are easily able to communicate with users and alter content – an ability identified by Ross (1997, p.676) as important in dealing with an audience who are often inaccurately represented by mainstream media.

While he is writing in 1964 and thus pre-internet\textsuperscript{16}, McLuhan’s theory could be applied to mean that the internet could result in the strengthening of disability culture as a result of its ability to link people of common interests and experiences irrespective of time and space. Costigan and Barnes see the internet as helping to create a sense of community amongst people who would not have otherwise met (Costigan 1999, pp.xvii-xix; Barnes 2001). Christine Hine (2000, p.9) argues that the internet plays a role in the formation and maintenance of culture. The only drawback in applying these theories in regards to disability is that disabled people are a mainly unemployed and unskilled sector of society. The Summer 2002 Labour Force Survey (Disability Rights Commission 2003) found that of the 6.9 million disabled people of working age in Great Britain, almost half are out of work. Disabled people are also five times as likely as non-disabled people to be out of work and claiming benefits, and are twice as likely as non-disabled people to have no educational qualifications. Because of this many disabled people may not have access to the internet, nor possess the skills needed to take part\textsuperscript{17}.

\textsuperscript{16} ‘The Medium is the Message’ was originally published in 1964.
\textsuperscript{17} A study of how blind and visually impaired people accessed information on the Internet in Australia by Williamson, Wright, Schauder and Bow (2001) also makes this point.
McLuhan also argues that the content of new forms of media often draw on styles from previous media (McLuhan 1995, p.226). Within Ouch, while the content is based on a print magazine-style format, the website includes a message board which is being used in a way that is a return to a discussion style of communication somewhat similar to oral culture in the past. The Ouch website could be also considered a departure from print-centred disability media produced by disabled people as, instead of focusing on advocacy or adopting a political stance, the site aims to promote a people-focused forum for discussion and ideas, not unlike Jurgen Habermas’ theory of the public sphere18 (Calhoun 1999).

3.7 Summary
This literature review highlights problems in the ways that mainstream media currently represent disabled people. Within the UK, studies on representation of disability tend to focus on content analysis19, identifying disabling language, and critiquing journalistic practice. I have found no studies of the representation of disability in the UK media which deal with my definition of critical discourse analysis as detailed in my method chapter. It should also be noted that content analysis used alone does not take into account power relationships within language, nor does it examine changing word meanings or reclamation of previously negative terminology. Analysing the representation of disability using content analysis neglects the main premise of the social model – that disability is created in relation to power and oppression. With the exception of Sweeney (2003) who deals in part with the production of radio by a producer/team who are disabled and a report in Sancho (2003) which examines television, I am unable to find research examining the quality of disabled people’s self representation within the mainstream UK media. In the case of the internet, investigation into its use with regards to disability reveals two perspectives. Firstly, that the internet it is a technology which has the ability to transform disabled people’s lives. Secondly that disabled people are being shut out of this new technology through cost, education and inaccessible technology. This leads on to the next chapter which sets out the methodology used to analyse the representation of disability and disabled people on Ouch.

18 Habermas sees the public sphere as consisting of private individuals debating public issues in a rational-critical manner (Calhoun 1999, p.1). Within these debates, decisions are made on quality of argument and irrespective of status or tradition (Calhoun 1999, pp.1-2). An understanding of this concept is vital in theorizing and understanding on public discourse and democracy.

19 A point also made in Ross (1997, p.669).
4.0 METHOD

4.1 Introduction

I have used a mixture of content and critical discourse analysis to examine how disabled people chose to represent themselves on the BBC website Ouch. Text from the website has been analysed to provide answers to the following three questions:

- How are disabled people represented on the BBC website Ouch?
- What type of ideology and power structure is evident in the discourse used in articles on Ouch?
- How has the technological format of the Internet influenced the content of Ouch?

A closer examination of content analysis and critical discourse analysis will follow later on in this chapter. Before this, I will explain how I selected which articles to analyse, and what variables were coded for within these articles.

4.2 Article selection

I analysed a preliminary sample of six articles in January 2004 in order to help me refine the methods and categories before the June sample was taken. As a result of this, a sample of 48 articles was selected from Ouch on June 1, 2004 and saved as MHTML documents so as to preserve their content as it was on this day. This number was chosen to be an amount which would provide a manageable but reasonably representative amount of sample for content analysis and critical discourse analysis that was able to be examined in three months I had available. Within this, each article was analysed as a stand-alone piece of text to avoid making assumptions about the reader’s knowledge of the website.

As my aim was to study content which was accessible to as many readers as possible, only text was analysed in any depth. This was because the text-only option ‘betsie’ on the site alters the format of some parts of the website for visually impaired people. As a result, the text was the only part of Ouch’s content which was the same for all visitors. In addition to the textual analysis, the only analysis of pictures was those included with articles. These images were briefly examined for evidence of representation of visible ethnicity.
As there was no standard order of articles across the website, the selection criteria was organised to gather a sample as representative as possible of the text across the entire website. Articles were chosen from six sections on the website: the ‘Features’, ‘Columnists’, ‘Close Up’, ‘Weblog’, ‘TV & Radio’ and ‘Life Files’ sections. The sections ‘Play’, ‘News’ and ‘About’ were excluded from the sample either because they did not contain news or feature articles, or they had not been written by Ouch writers. Equal numbers of articles were taken from each section so as to provide a balanced sample. The criteria of article selection were as follows:

- **‘Features’** – As the articles in this section were unordered and undated, the first eight articles on the ‘Features’ home page were selected.

- **‘Columnists’** – A total of eight articles were taken from the ‘Columnists’ back archive page. In order to gather a variety of different styles of writing, one article was selected from each columnist as follows: the first article from the first columnist, the second article from the second columnist, and so on. If a columnist did not have enough articles published to fit this, then their next nearest article was selected. Articles by columnist Cherry Moore were excluded from the sample as they were only available in video format and thus beyond the scope of the analysis.

- **‘Close Up’** - As the articles in this section were unordered and undated, the first eight articles listed on the ‘Close Up’ home page were selected.

- **‘Weblog’** – Due to the large number of articles on the ‘Weblog’ archive, eight samples were selected from a week’s worth of entries taken from the second week (day eight to 14 inclusive) of every second month - beginning from December 2002 - until the total is reached. If there were no entries that fell within these dates then entries were taken from the third week (day 15 to 21 inclusive).

- **‘Life Files’** – As the articles here were unordered and undated, the first eight articles on the ‘Life Files’ home page were selected.

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20 A web log is an online diary.

21 *Play* consists of polls, quizzes, cartoons and games; *News* links to articles on disability from mainstream media online websites; and *About* outlines the aims of the website.
‘TV & Radio’ – These were dated and ordered chronologically. The first eight articles originating from Ouch\textsuperscript{22} were selected.

Video content on Ouch was not examined in any depth, nor was the home page, the contents page, audio descriptions, or the website’s design and structure. In addition to the accessibility factor discussed earlier, analysing audio descriptions and videos would have required further methodological considerations not feasible within the scope of a dissertation this size.

4.3 Content Analysis
Content analysis is a quantitative research method which can be used to study and analyse communication in a systematic, valid and replicable way (Walizer and Wienir; Krippendorf; and Kerlinger; all in Wimmer and Dominick 2003, pp.140-141). Researchers use content analysis to count units of analysis present in selected texts or images, as it is useful both in examining representation (Bauer 2000, p.133) and also for reducing the complexity associated with analysing large collections of texts (Bauer 2000, p.132).

4.3.1 Coding variables
I have used content analysis to identify the type of coverage given to disabled people and disability in the articles published on Ouch. In order to find out what subjects were written about on Ouch, how the website ordered these topics, what the gender and disability type of the writers was, and the incidence of visible ethnicity in pictures, I have coded for the following factors:

- Topic of article (e.g. sport, travel, arts, media, entertainment)
- Section of the site that the article was located in (e.g. life files, columns, features)
- Gender of author
- Impairment of author
- Impairment of subject
- Mention of ethnic diversity in an article and if so, which (I examined articles for mention of nationality in relation to people)

\textsuperscript{22} Some articles in this section are from websites from other parts of the BBC.
• Visible ethnicity in pictures compared to the total number of pictures present
  (I examined images for visible ethnic diversity in facial characteristics and skin tone)
• Narrative style (news, opinion, non-personal feature, review, question and answer
  interview, personal anecdote)
• Presence of hyperlinks in article

I also examined whether an article was personality or issue driven (Clogston 1990, p.5). John
Clogston’s 1990 study *Disability Coverage in 16 Newspapers* coded for, amongst a number
of factors, how issue oriented an article was (Clogston 1990, p.6). Within this study, this was
used to determine whether an article focused solely on an issue or individuals, or a mixture of
both. Articles which just focused on individuals could be seen as personalising disability,
while issue-focused articles treated the issue as the focus of the story. Coding for issue or
personality within this study helped me determine whether the sample articles were
examining societal or personality based issues.

4.3.2 A critique of content analysis
While content analysis can be useful in textual research, it also has a number of weaknesses.
Firstly, while it counts units of text, it does not yield up meanings behind these units (Bauer
2000, p.145), such as subverted intent within text on behalf of the producer, or alternative
audience readings. Secondly, because content analysis is a social construct, coding reliability
across texts may not be consistent (Bauer 2000, p.p.141-143).

To minimise the weaknesses of content analysis, categories were chosen to be as
unambiguous as possible. This was to avoid the possibility of variables fitting in more than
one category. While I was the only coder, articles were coded twice - the second time blind -
to reduce errors. Furthermore, this method was used in conjunction with discourse analysis
so as provide an analysis of the text beyond that of simply ‘counting words’.

4.4 Critical discourse analysis
Critical discourse analysis is a qualitative research method which links the analysis of text
with socio-cultural practices (Fairclough 2003, pp.28-29). Gill describes this as:
a careful, close reading that moves between text and context to examine the content, organization and functions of discourse...It is an interpretation, warranted by detailed argument and attention to the material being studied.” (Gill 2000, p.188)

Wodak defines the aims of this method as to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signalled, constituted and legitimized by language use (Wodak 2001, p.2). Critical discourse analysis views social life as being characterised by different kinds of conflict (Gill 2000, pp.174-176; Fairclough 2001, p.75). Furthermore, researchers using this method tend to view discourse and language as an important part of social process. Critical discourse analysis of texts attempts to find out what influence language has on these processes (Fairclough 2001, p. 135). Researchers also often use critical discourse analysis to examine how conditions of social interaction, minority representation, power and social conditions are formed or maintained through language use (Fairclough 2003, p.18; Fairclough 2001, pp.38-39; Gill 2000, p.173). It is also useful in understanding texts as multi-function representations of the world (Fairclough 2003, p.25) and can be used to examine construction of reader and writer identity (Fairclough 2003, p.58)

4.4.1 Guidelines for analysis
I aimed to use critical discourse analysis to examine how language was used to represent the world on Ouch, what identities were created for disabled and non-disabled people by Ouch’s writers, and what type of relationship was set up between disabled and non-disabled society. I also wanted to see what styles of writing were popular on Ouch. Therefore, in addition to the variables listed in content analysis, my sample of articles was examined for:

- Labels referring to disabled people
- Labels referring to non-disabled people
- Coverage of relationships between disabled and non-disabled people
- Descriptions of disability
- Treatment of disabled people as active or passive actors. Articles were analysed for transitivity of verbs in sentences relating to disabled peoples’ actions. This involved verb groups being categorised into four main groups. These were: material (physical activity based), mental (thought based), verbal (speech based), and relational (action dependent on something or someone else). Articles were also examined for use of
modality, and reportage of speech. Reportage of speech was split into three categories. These were: direct quotations; summaries (the gist of what was said); and interpretation (how the writer interpreted what was said).

- Presuppositions of knowledge about disabled people
- Article structure\textsuperscript{23}
- The use of rhetoric

The general examination of the 48 articles from my sample was followed by a deeper analysis of two articles.

4.4.2 A critique of critical discourse analysis

It should be noted that critical discourse analysis has a number of weaknesses. It cannot produce broad empirical generalisations (Gill 2000, p.186). As this method of analysis is heavily dependent on how a researcher interprets the text, it is generally seen as an ‘insider’s job’ (Fairclough 2001, p.139). In addition to this, its emphasis on text and representation means that the method should not be used on its own. To do so would ignore both the interpretative ability of the audience (Fairclough 2003, p.27) and the influence the production process has in creating meaning (Fairclough 2003, pp.32-34). In order to minimise these weaknesses I have combined the results with those from the content analysis. I have also drawn on my knowledge and experience of disability in interpreting the findings.

4.5 Overall critique

There were a number of drawbacks in using these methods with regards to my dissertation. For content analysis, the sample size of 48 articles offers only a limited snapshot of Ouch. Yet, in regards to critical discourse analysis, this is a rather large sample with regards to the scope of this dissertation. The decision to exclude video and audio from the sample has limited the scope of the findings. Ideally, my analysis would involve a larger sample for content analysis, and a deeper examination using critical discourse analysis. Neither of these was possible in a dissertation this size, with the time I had available.

\textsuperscript{23} What problem is introduced and then resolved in the article.
4.6 Summary

The research tools of content and critical discourse analysis have been chosen to examine texts from Ouch in a way that will create a fuller picture of the type and quality of the representation of disabled people on the website than if either method was used alone. Content analysis was useful for revealing an overall picture of the content of a large number of texts from Ouch. Critical discourse analysis was used to extract a deeper understanding of individual texts, language and representation on Ouch. Results from the two methods were then combined to examine the influence that the internet has had on the content of Ouch. The resulting analysis and findings from my examination of a sample of articles from Ouch are presented in the next chapter.
5.0 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

5.1 Key questions
My content analysis of the sample from Ouch aims to address two questions:

- How are disabled people represented?
- What type of ideology and power structure is evident in the discourse used?

5.2 Content analysis findings

5.2.1 Introduction
The aim of using content analysis was to discover information about the content of my sample from Ouch. For clarity, the findings from the content analysis have been split into two sections. The first section is concerned with personal representation and deals with how disabled people are represented in the sample. It includes:

- The gender split of authors
- The authors’ impairments
- The different impairments which are written about
- The amount of visible ethnic diversity in the sample (based on analysis of (i) images and (ii) mention of nationality and ethnicity)

The second section is concerned with the overall representation of disability in society and therefore examines what type of article and writing styles were used in the sample. It includes:

- What topics were written about
- What sort of information was given in the articles
- The journalistic style
- Instances of hyperlinks within the texts.

5.2.2 Personal representation
I decided to code for gender of author to find out if there was an imbalance in the gender of the writers on Ouch. Within my sample, 41.7 per cent of the authors were specified as male, compared to 35.4 per cent who were female. Therefore, it is concluded that there does not appear to be a highly significant difference in genders of authors.
Table 1 – Gender of author

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Cumulative per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>77.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However it should be noted that of the authors coded as ‘Not specified’, eight were from the weblog section which appears to have been written by more than one person\(^24\). If the gender of the writers of this section were known, this could change the result.

By counting the types of impairments that authors had and what impairment they wrote about, I hope to discover whether any type of impairment dominates the sample, how the authors label themselves, and how they label other disabled people.

The impairment category which dominates the sample with 39.6 per cent of the total is ‘none given’ - those authors who do not mention if they had an impairment or who do not refer to themselves as a disabled person\(^25\). This means that being labelled disabled is established as a norm. Authors coded as having a ‘non-specific impairment’ account for 22.9 per cent of the sample. This appears to support theories of personal representation on the internet as discussed in the literature review. Within the sample, many of the authors are deliberately choosing how they represent themselves. It should be noted that while the medium of the internet allows disabled people to choose how they are represented, many of the authors are still identifying as disabled. Despite – or maybe because - they are writing in the ‘safe’ and sympathetic online environment of Ouch, they are not identifying themselves by impairment. Instead they are choosing to be portrayed either as just ‘people’ or as ‘disabled people’. Furthermore, they are also choosing to describe themselves in non-medical terms.

\(^{24}\) This has been confirmed as fact in an interview that the website’s editors had with Dr Donald Matheson (Matheson 2003). See Appendix 4.

\(^{25}\) The category of ‘none given’ should not be confused with the ‘able-bodied’ category which contains writers who said they did not have a disability.
Table 2 – Impairment of author

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Cumulative per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None given</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>39.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-specific impairment</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manic depression</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able-bodied</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>72.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cerebral palsy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>77.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>81.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility restriction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albinism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>85.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple sclerosis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facial disfigurement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>89.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limb amputation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention deficit disorder</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>93.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing impairment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>95.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-specific mental illness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>97.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortened limbs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>48</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that because the weblog has no identifiable author and thus no mention of the author’s impairment this may have skewed the results in Table 2. The intermittent references to the author as both ‘I’, ‘we’ and ‘us’ indicate that the weblog may have been written by more than one person.\(^{26}\)

The range of impairments written is far greater than the range of impairments of the authors in the sample (in so far as possible to judge). This is because while the authors often draw on personal experiences in articles, they do not always limit themselves to writing about their own disability.

The most frequent disability referred to in the articles is ‘non-specific impairment’ with 26.9 per cent of the sample. This could indicate that a sense of community is being forged through the creation of a catch-all ‘disabled’ identity. Visual impairment makes up 12.8 per cent of subject impairments. This is an unsurprising occurrence as the producer and editor of the website, Damon Rose, is visually impaired. Learning disabled impairments account for nine

\(^{26}\) This has been confirmed as fact in an interview that the website’s editors had with Dr Donald Matheson (Matheson 2003). See Appendix 4 for details.
per cent of subject impairments, despite the fact that there does not appear to be any articles written by learning disabled people in the sample. Learning disabled people are more likely to appear as the subject of articles rather than the authors on Ouch.

Table 3 – Impairment of subject

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category label</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Per centage of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-specific impairment</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual impairment</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning disabled</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limb amputation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted growth</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple sclerosis</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cerebral palsy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manic depression</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortened limbs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheelchair user</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility restriction</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing impairment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial paralysis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADD/ADHD</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facial disfigurement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spinal injury</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down syndrome</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albinism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>78</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I decided to code for mention of ethnic diversity in text and evidence of visible ethnicity in pictures in order to see how diversity is represented on Ouch (see Table 4 and 5 for full results). This is because I wanted to know whether the website accurately reflects the cultural makeup of Britain, or if it puts forward a white British representation of disability.

The authorship and subjects within my sample present a predominately Western and white perspective of disability. Within the sample, 85.4 per cent of the articles contain no representation of - or reference to – ethnic diversity. Articles coded as either ‘no mention of ethnicity’ or ‘white ethnicity’ made up 91.7 per cent of the sample. Given that government
statistics in 2001 found that UK has a minority ethnic popular of 7.9 per cent\textsuperscript{27}, it could be assumed that minority ethnicity accurately reflects British society. However, this is not quite the case. Across the sample, ethnic diversity and ethnicity is presented as something foreign and not British. Britishness is represented, with one exception, as being white and non-diverse ethnically. There are no articles which contained experiences of ethnic or non-white British people. Instead, articles focus on topics such as travelling in India, the contents of a Brazilian website, and a disabled Australian’s comedy routine. Within these texts, disabled people with non-white ethnic backgrounds are represented as ‘other’. Rather ironically, Kevin McLaughlin’s article ‘Holiday Diary: A White Man Abroad’ does not refer to visible ethnic diversity, but narrates the author’s experience of holidaying in Tenerife with albinism.

Table 4 – Mention of diversity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Cumulative per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No mention</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>85.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North American</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In regards to the amount of visible ethnicity in pictures, the result is similar to that of mention of diversity discussed in Table 4. Only one picture in the sample\textsuperscript{28} features a picture of a non-white British person\textsuperscript{29}. The rest of the photos containing visible ethnicity are of people not from or in Britain.

Table 5 – Visible ethnicity in pictures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total pictures</th>
<th>Visible ethnicity in pictures</th>
<th>Per cent of sample pictures with visible ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>119</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{27} Source: National Statistics website: www.statistics.gov.uk
\textsuperscript{Crown copyright material is reproduced with the permission of the Controller of HMSO.}
\textsuperscript{28} This was in the article ‘Harry Potter and the Curse of Disability’, by Christine Papamichael.
\textsuperscript{29} As is standard across the website, neither pictures had captions indicating what is in them.
With regards to Table 4 and 5, it should be noted that coding for visible ethnicity in pictures only picks up obvious forms of ethnicity. People who would class themselves as white but not British also would not be counted under my coding parameters. Furthermore, the coding within this section relies solely on my interpretation of the text and pictures.

5.2.3 Overall representation of disability
The aim of counting topics is to determine what the most popular subject in the sample is as this could contribute towards the representation of disabled people on Ouch. Each article is coded as having one topic. Overall, I found the sample to contain a large variety of topics.

Table 6 – Topic of article

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Cumulative per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>52.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>60.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>72.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>77.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>81.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>85.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social care</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>89.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>93.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>95.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>97.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>48</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most popular topic is entertainment\(^{30}\) (29.2 per cent of the sample), unsurprising given that the website is run by the BBC. The next most popular topics are health (14.6 per cent of the sample), travel (8.3 per cent) and society\(^{31}\) (8.3 per cent of the sample).

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\(^{30}\) This category includes leisure based media and includes articles about film, television fiction, books, live comedy, music and gaming.

\(^{31}\) This category includes articles which refer to the relationship of disabled people to society.
The findings from this study of Ouch in my dissertation are in contrast to findings from studies of the mainstream press such as those of *Stop Press!* undertaken in 1999, and also my own study of the representation of disabled people in *The Guardian* and *The Sun* newspapers during March 2004 (Thoreau 2004) undertaken as part of my MA coursework.\(^{32}\)

*Stop Press!* finds that the stories about disabled people in its sample of national, regional and local newspapers in 1999 tend to focus on a narrow number of topics. The most popular of these include: medical research, medical negligence and legal or crime stories (Cooke, Daone and Morris 2000, p.4). In local newspapers, the most popular topic is fundraising initiatives (Cooke, Daone and Morris 2000, p.4). The first two topics represent disabled people as ill and always searching for cures. The final topic puts forward an overly negative image of disabled people as victims.

My own study of disability coverage in mainstream press finds a larger variety of topics being covered (Thoreau 2004). However, the treatment of disabled people within this is such that it still presents an inaccurate representation (Thoreau 2004, pp.13-14). National news articles tend to focus on human interest stories, not hard news. International stories use disability to pique reader interest. Health stories view disability as an individual issue as journalists often only write about disabled people in individual medical cases. Articles about charity appeals present disabled people as in need of financial assistance.

It should be noted that while health also dominated the Ouch sample, topics within this category differ vastly from those in the mainstream media - *Stop Press!* and *The Guardian* and *The Sun* study. Ouch articles in the sample focus on different angles including complementary diets, sexuality, and the diagnosis of disability. The other two studies find that health related articles tend to concentrate on subjects such as the search for cures for disability and/or individual cases of illness (Cooke, Daone and Morris 2000, p.14; Thoreau 2004, p.12). Both are topics which represent disabled people as ill and searching for cures, a representation which may not be wholly accurate.

\(^{32}\) A copy of this can be provided on request.
I decided to code for article emphasis in order to see how content from the sample is presented (see Table 7 for full results). My analysis finds that 77.1 per cent of articles contain personality driven content\(^{33}\). A total of 60.4 per cent of articles in the sample feature disabled people as the main topic. Only 22.9 per cent of articles are solely issue driven. This could be taken as a reflection by the website to not provide information or act as a political based website, but to reflect “experiences, thoughts and give alternative slants on all things big and small”\(^{34}\).

### Table 7 – Whether an article is issue or personality driven

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Cumulative per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personality driven</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>60.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue driven</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality/issue driven</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>48</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I decided to code for narrative style in order to find out what type of articles dominated the sample (see Table 8 for full results). With regards to narrative style, personal anecdote\(^{35}\) is by far the most popular writing style, accounting for 47.9 per cent of the sample. Non-personal feature is the second most popular at 20.8 per cent. The high number of articles based on personal anecdotes can be attributed to many of the website’s authors choosing to writing exclusively about personal experiences.

### Table 8 – Narrative style of article

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Cumulative per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal anecdote</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-personal feature</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question and answer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>93.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>97.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q&amp;A/personal anecdote</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>48</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{33}\) See the Method Chapter for an explanation of these categories.  
\(^{34}\) See www.bbc.co.uk/ouch/about  
\(^{35}\) This is when a feature article consists largely of accounts of personal experiences the author has undergone.
The aim of counting hyperlinks and whether they connect to web pages on or off Ouch is to ascertain how loyal Ouch readers are considered to be by the website (see Table 9 for full results). For example, a website which does not have off-site hyperlinks could be seen as believing that a reader is unlikely to return once they have seen content from another website. In the sample, 60.4 per cent of articles had hyperlinks that directed readers both on and off the Ouch website. A further 29.2 per cent contained only on-site hyperlinks.

Findings from this section could be interpreted in a number of ways. In relation to the amount of off-site hyperlinks, Ouch appears to assume its audience are reasonably loyal. It also could view users as intelligent navigators, in which case where they are directed is not particularly important. Therefore the indication of assumption of reader loyalty through the incidence of hyperlinks may be somewhat overstated.

Table 9 – Presence of hyperlinks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Cumulative per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On and off Ouch</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>60.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only on Ouch</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>89.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only off Ouch</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On Ouch the majority of these hyperlinks are in the column on the left hand side of the article. The only section of sample which has hyperlinks consistently throughout the main text of the article is the weblog. However, it should be noted that hyperlinks are primarily used to inform readers about specialised information to help them better understand the content of articles.

5.3 Critical discourse analysis findings

5.3.1 Aims

The aim of my critical discourse analysis is to gain a deeper understanding of how the language used on Ouch represents disabled people, and also society as a whole. I also want to examine how power and ideology are portrayed on the website. The section begins with an overall analysis of the sample, before then featuring two articles which have been analysed in greater depth.
5.3.2 The representation of disabled people

The aim here is to provide a basic understanding of how disabled people choose to represent themselves, and how they see the audience of Ouch.

Throughout the sample, labels referring to disabled people tend to be largely informal. I found six articles which contained formal titles when referring to disabled people. These articles are ‘Disability History Week 9-14 July’, by Ian Cook, ‘Inclusion in Care’ by Ian Cook, ‘Being Different: Ugandan students on disability and relationships’ by Geoff Adams-Spink, Crippled Monkey weblog for December 2002, Crippled Monkey weblog for September 2003, and ‘Accessible gaming’ by Sile O’Modhrain. It should be noted that the article by Sile O’Modhrain has one reference to the author’s doctorate while the rest of the job titles refer to non-disabled people. As the majority of articles in the Ouch sample are first person narratives that are been written by disabled people, it is not surprising that disabled people are most often referred to in the first person – ‘I’ or ‘me’. The website writes about authors using both their first and surnames on first mention. This then drops to mention by first name only. Disabled people are rarely given job titles and when they are this tend to be non-specific. For example, “Paul Green… prefers to describe himself as a ‘propagandist for the disability movement’”, “disabled comedian Laurence Clark”, and “Disability academic Mike Oliver [their bold type]”.

When descriptions of impairments are used to describe disabled people, this is most often done using casual, non-medical terms. For example, groups of disabled people are referred in a number of different ways throughout the sample including “AS kids”, “CP people” and “wheelchair users”. This casual style of language is also used in references to individual disabled people. For example, Lucy Sholl refers to her date as ‘[a man] who just happened to have one leg’ in the article ‘Going out on a limb’, while Liz Main refers to herself as a ‘novelty mad person’ in the article ‘Pyjama Girl is not brave’. Within the sample, I could find

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36 It should be noted that within this article the title refers to “BBC disability affairs correspondent Peter White”.
37 Asperger syndrome.
38 Cerebral palsy.
only six articles which included only medical terms to describe disabled people. While this could be considered a significant number of articles, it should be noted that three of these articles are written by one writer, Andy Behrman. Within these, he refers to himself as “a manic depressive”. Another two articles have been written by non-disabled people. Jacqui Jackson refers to ‘children with autistic spectrum differences’ in her article ‘Do I have to go to school today?’, while Steve Palmer notes that ‘our son has Down Syndrome’ in his article ‘Stan’s guide to ligging it’. The seventh article “What are You Staring at? – Iain Hutchison: Q&A” which has no identifiable author. It contains quotes from Hutchison, a surgeon, in which he repeatedly describes disabled people as patients or people “with facial disfigurement”.

Throughout the sample, labels are used in ways which promote a sense of community amongst disabled people. For example, the authors describe groups of disabled people as ‘us’ or ‘we’ and often refer to the ‘disabled community’, the ‘VI community’ and the ‘blind community’.

5.3.3 Descriptions of disability
Disability and impairment are described in a variety of different ways across the sample. These include: the use of informal, non-medical and often ironic language to describe impairment; an increased occurrence of slang and abridged language in the middle and latter parts of articles; and a small incidence of the use of verbs which connote struggle on the part of disabled people.

Throughout the sample, impairments are most often referred to in generic terms. For example medical terms such as multiple sclerosis or cerebral palsy are less likely to be used than the more generic disabled and disability. Impairments are also described using informal language, and these references often contain humour, irony and the reclamation of previously offensive language. For example, author Jamie Beddard refers to having cerebral palsy as “my accustomed role as slightly wobbly man”, Lucy Sholl notes that she and her new date

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39 I have not included ‘The latest footwear craze?’ by Adam Hills as when referring to impairment by medical terms he flags this up, for example: “the correct scientific name for the stump I possess is a ‘Symes Amputation’.” Aside from this, Hills does not use medical terminology.

40 This section refers only to the description of impairment and acquisition of impairment. Thus it should not be confused with the previous section on labels referring to disabled people.
are sitting at “the Cripples’ table”, Liz Main describes what happened after she had “come out as crazy”; and Francesca Martinez writes about how she “was walking a bit funny” and muses about how she has done some of her “best pavement-hogging work” in London.

When more specific medical terms are used, they are often only written in the introduction to the article, and then abridged further on. For example, Luke Jackson in the article ‘Luke on being filmed’ introduces his impairment by writing “I have Asperger’s Syndrome [sic], a ‘milder’ form of Autism (yeah right!)”. He goes on to describe in clear lay terms how his impairment influences his life: “This means that I have difficulties with social interaction, communication and imagination.” Throughout the rest of the article, Asperger Syndrome is written about using slang-like references such as “life is hard for AS kids” and “life as an AS teenager”. A similar form of language use can be found in the article ‘Desirability: Veracam’. The second paragraph in the article introduces Vera’s impairment by stating:

She lost all her fingers and both legs below the knee in 1993, following an acute staph bacterial infection contracted during an operation for breast implants.

After this paragraph, the article is written in the first person and the references to her disability are far more informal and include “my disability”, “life without fingers and feet” and “my physical differences”. The exception to this is the article ‘What are you staring at?’ which does not separate the disabled people from their impairments and views them in a medical manner. Throughout the text, surgeon Iain Hutchison describes disabled people as either patients or people.

I was able to find five texts that refer to disability by using groups of verbs which connote struggle and difficulty. Two of these articles are by Andy Behrman. His article ‘Electroboy escapes death and deals with a new type of disability’ contains a number of these references. These include the following descriptions and statements: “[topics he has written about include] coping on living with my mental illness”; “my battle with manic depression”; “his [Andy’s] mental condition”; “Any type of disability is a challenge”; “learning to cope with my mental illness is my greatest achievement ever”; “[people] challenged by mental or physical disabilities”; and “an entirely different aspect of ‘dysfunction’”. In the second to last paragraph of the article, he comments that he has:

41 No author is given for this article.
finally come to the realisation that it’s not necessary to compare mental disabilities with physical disabilities and determine which are worse. Because neither are good.

In his article ‘Electroboy: You’re a lunatic, a freak, a psycho, a crack-up and a mental case!’ as he describes himself as having “suffered with a mental disability”, this being something he has to “cope” with. He also refers to his disability as “this invisible illness” and “my ‘death sentence’” and notes that “my manic depression was ravaging my life”. Lucy Sholl refers to herself as “someone with stamina and pain problems”, while Liz Main writes about her “mental health problem” and being “in the depths of depression”. Christine Papamichael’s article ‘Harry Potter and the Curse of Disability’ includes quotes from a fan fiction author who puts a character “into a situation where he suffers a disabling injury”. Papamichael then notes that the said author ‘inflicts debilitating disability on Rowling’s characters’. Liz Ball’s article ‘GPS to guide? Or guide to GPS’ refers to “the challenge of getting around as a blind person”.

5.3.4 The representation of non-disabled people

I decided to examine the representation of non-disabled people in the sample because this could provide information as to how disabled people see themselves and how they view society as a whole. Would non-disabled people be portrayed the same by disabled people as they are by the mainstream media? Or would the articles represent them in ways similar to the ‘othered’ ways that disabled people are often represented? My analysis reveals the latter to be the case.

Within the Ouch sample, non-disabled people are defined by what they are not. This results in them becoming the ‘other’ (Woodward 1997, p.2; Derrida, Laclau and Butler in Hall 1996, p.6) to disabled people’s majority. This is in direct contradiction to the representation in many mainstream media, in which the reverse is true (Thoreau 2004). This oppositional creation of identity on Ouch has resulted in language divisions with regards to how disabled and non-disabled people are represented.

42 J.K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter series of books.
Non-disabled people are also represented in ways which signal their relationship to disabled people. For example, author Andy Behrman labels able-bodied people according to how they are related to his life. In his article ‘Electroboy escapes death and deals with a new type of disability’ he refers to people overseeing his treatment as “my psychiatrist”, “my psychotherapist”, “my parents”, “my therapist” and “my doctor”.

Throughout the sample, non-disabled people are also often referred to only as nameless and untitled individuals. For example, in Francesca Martinez’s article ‘Mean Streets’ she uses the following labels to refer to non-disabled people:

- he (3 instances), woman (2 instances), you (2 instances),
- other people, this bloke, driver, irate taxi driver, old man, her, kind considerate traffic wardens, traffic warden, able-bodied drivers.

The same type of labels can also be found in Mat Fraser’s article ‘Mat’s Evil Twin vs The Journalists’, where he labels able-bodied people as:

- I (9 instances), journalists (3 instances), she (3 instances),
- general public, various different journalists, people in the TV business, they, you, my betters, women, prostitutes, girlfriends, them, people, your Mum.

Excluding the two articles which have been written by able-bodied people in the sample (one of which is analysed in greater depth in the next section), non-disabled people are also given less opportunity to voice their opinion than disabled people are. Furthermore, when non-disabled people are quoted, this tends to be in regards to their negative attitudes towards disabled people. In the 48 articles which I analysed, 11 contain reportage of speech by people who are identified as being able-bodied. Three of these involve the authors writing about occasions when able-bodied people are either patronising them or berating them.

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43 This reference is from the author making two direct appeals to non-disabled people in the final paragraph of the article.
44 It should be noted that this is when Mat paraphrases what he believes non-disabled journalists wanted to say about him during interviews, including statements such as ‘You [a journalist] mean: I can’t think of anything else to ask. Personally, I don’t want to see any more of you disgusting people on our screens, but PC will probably dictate it.’
45 These are ‘Do I have to go to school today?’ by Jacqui Jackson, and ‘Stan’s guide to ligging it’ by Steve Palmer.
46 See the weblog entry for 12 December 2003 for an example of this.
47 ‘Pyjama Girl is not brave’ by Liz Main.
48 ‘Mean Streets’ by Francesca Martinez and ‘A Brit in Boston’ by Penny Batchelor.
A further two articles involve quotes from statements about disability which have been issued by able-bodied people. The first of these is in the weblog entry for 18 June, 2003 which contains a statement from ‘Pop Stars’ judge Louis Walsh apologising for negative comments he made about the Special Olympics. The second is in a weblog entry for 21 October, 2003. This contains extracts from a statement by comedian Jim Davidson regarding his refusal to perform his comedy routine in front of a group of wheelchair users. ‘Inclusion in Care’ by Ian Cook contains quotes from a Barnardo’s manager. The article “What are you staring at?” interviews facial surgeon Iain Hutchison. While the article contains extensive quotes by Hutchison, it concludes by recounting a tale about him leaving a patient during surgery in order to give a lecture at the National Portrait gallery. This has the result of undermining his status that was created in rest of the article. Finally, the weblog entry for 18 December, 2002 contains quotes from a radio production company executive arguing against hiring disabled people in media presenting roles.

5.3.5 The relationship between disabled and non-disabled people
The aim behind this was to see how disabled people represented their relationship with non-disabled people. Will it be portrayed in a way that reflects the reality of life as a disabled person? Or in a way that disabled people would like their lives to be?

Throughout the sample, the relationship between disabled and non-disabled people is presented as being full of misunderstandings by non-disabled people. This includes non-disabled people seeing disabled people as being: passive and inactive; in need of help from others; ‘less than’ sexually compared to non-disabled people; objects of curiosity; super-achieving; and faking having a disability. Except for the last, all of the above misunderstandings can be found in Colin Barnes’ listing of commonly recurring media stereotypes in the report *Disabling Imagery and the Media* (Barnes 1992) which I examined in the literature review.

I found five articles which include comments about how non-disabled people see disabled people as passive and powerless. The article by Christine Papamichael concludes with the statement that authors of fan fiction include disability in their novels so that they can show
that “we [disabled people] aren’t passive, drooling prawns.” Jamie Beddard’s article detailing his trip to India sees him comment that the Indian customs and security services seemed unable to believe that someone in a wheelchair can also be a journalist. The article on the documentary *Binding Love* details how a couple with learning disabilities are required to get support from social services and government agencies in order to raise a child together. Andy Behrman’s article ‘Electroboy: You’re a lunatic, a freak, a psycho, a crack-up and a mental case’ notes that people around him did not see disability as being something that successful people had:

family and friends were convinced I was functioning just fine because I was efficient, productive and successful.

The weblog entry for 12 August 2003 contains an anecdote about a physically disabled customer who had his bank account closed because his bank felt he was “mentally unable to deal with his affairs” [Ouch’s bold type].

The sample included five articles which contain references to how non-disabled people often see disabled people as objects of charity and in need of help. In the second paragraph of Paul Green’s article ‘Moses was disabled’ he notes that there are few disabled people as role models throughout history because they are either viewed as invisible or as ‘ciphers’ to prompt the non-disabled to undertake charitable tasks. Steve Palmer writes about the preferential treatment he gets when he is with his disabled son Stan. In Jamie Beddard’s article about India he writes about Indian people believe he is unable to manage for himself:

Though I would normally transfer myself from wheelchair into a taxi with no problem, around ten helpful people descended on me, dragging and lifting my challenging self into the vehicle.

Lucy Sholl notes the same type of reaction from able-bodied people. She writes that:

we went swimming, causing horrified looks in the Jacuzzi as a one legged man helped a seemingly able bodied woman out of the pool.

In Laurence Clark’s article ‘The Jim’ll Fix It Survivor’s Club’ he writes about how a popular television presenter “never questioned whether we [disabled people] actually wanted him to run all those marathons for charity”.

Two articles contain references to disabled people being seen as sexually ‘less than’ compared to able bodied people. One such statement is found on the weblog entry for 10
February 2004. Writing about Fox television reality dating show *The Littlest Groom*?, the article questions whether Fox is:

making the assumption that an average-sized women [sic] must be a dwarf male’s ultimate fantasy? Oh Fox – you’re such a tease!

In ‘Desirability: Veracam’, erotic performer and amputee Vera Little comments that the way she exists is perfectly normal to her. At the end of the article she notes that ‘I have never felt that I didn’t deserve attention because of my physical differences.’

Seven articles contain references on how disabled people appear to be objects of curiosity for non-disabled people. In Lucy Sholl’s article on her experiences of dating, she details her concerns on what she believes non-disabled people could think about two disabled people in a relationship. Jamie Beddard’s article on India includes comments about how his wheelchair soon got more attention from local people than he did. When Penny Batchelor reviews the film *The Station Agent* she notes that the film contains a lot about the townspeople’s reactions to Fin’s stature. When Mat Fraser creates an alter-ego for able-bodied journalists in his article about press interviews, his ‘questions’ include ‘how the hell did you manage to get a shag’, and ‘I’d really like to ask you how you wipe your arse’. Liz Main writes about how ‘being a novelty mad person has given me access to places and people hitherto unimagined.’ Caroline O’Neill details how a Jobcentre staff person called over her colleagues to see the “Amazing Deaf Girl”. Penny Batchelor’s article ‘I Moscow Again’ contains the statement that:

“Our Chinese carriage attendant couldn’t be more helpful, insisting on carrying our bags and helping me off the train. I got the feeling he hadn’t seen many people with a physical disability on the train before.”

References to disabled people as ‘super cripples’ – having excessively admirable qualities - appear in five articles. In Andy Behrman’s article ‘Electroboy escapes death and deals with a new type of disability’ Behrman comments that ‘learning to cope with my mental illness is my greatest achievement ever’. Liz Main writes that many able-bodied people comment on her ‘braveness’ about talking about mental health:

apparently being prepared to stand up in public and talk about mental health – especially your own – is very brave.
In his article Steve Palmer notes that a number of people commented after the birth of his disabled son that: “If it HAD to happen, I can’t imagine a nicer couple for it to happen to.” The weblog entry for 19 December 2002, contains an entry on mountain climbing, noting that “disability and mountain climbing seem to go hand-in-hand as far as some documentary makers and organisations are concerned”. In ‘Why climb every mountain?’ author Emma Bowler defends her decision to learn how to ski by rebutting the ‘super crip’ stereotype:

Now don’t get me wrong – I’m not some disabled person with a double-barrelled surname, who feels compelled to prove that I am just as athletic as ‘normal’ people by climbing Everest, completing a trek across the Sahara, and rounding things off by sailing round the world single-handed. Oh no!

Four articles contain anecdotes about able-bodied people’s perceptions about disabled people with who have ‘hidden’ impairments. Francesca Martinez recounts four occasions where she is been accosted about using disability services or holding up traffic. Jacqui Jackson refers to the ‘hidden’ disability of autistic spectrum disorders. Luke Jackson writes:

“We [children with Asperger Syndrome] may look the same and talk pretty much the same, but fathoming out the rest of the world is pretty tiring.”

The ‘Student Diary’ of Ruth notes that because she has hidden impairments she has to deal with adverse reactions from other people including:

people glaring at you on the bus because you didn’t give up your seat to the old lady who just got on. They think you’re an ignorant teenager.

5.3.6 Assumptions of knowledge about disability

The articles in the sample assume a certain amount of knowledge on behalf of the reader. For example, multiple sclerosis is often referred to as MS, and cerebral palsy as CP. However, the website does recommend that if readers want to know more, they are encouraged to visit the onsite message board to ask. On many of the articles in the sample there are also hyperlinks which connect to external websites with further information that is not in the article. For example, Liz Ball’s article ‘GPS to guide? Or guide to GPS?’ has hyperlinks which connect to the following websites: BBC news; a project which investigates GPS.

49 See www.bbc.co.uk/ouch/about
requirements for visually impaired people; a discussion on how aircraft navigation equipment could help visually impaired people; and a list of electronic mobility aids.

5.3.7 Representation of power and ideology

Power and its agents are represented fairly anonymously throughout the sample. There are 11 exceptions to this. These are ‘How to bypass your brain and get motivated’ by Anna Rosevear, ‘Pyjama Girl is not brave’ by Liz Main, ‘Being Different: Ugandan students on disability and relationships’ by Geoff Adams-Spink and the eight articles from the Crippled Monkey weblog. Anna Rosevear’s article contains numerous references to able-bodied people with military titles. These titles are given in full throughout most of the article. While this could be superficially interpreted as her giving more weight to these people’s position and opinions, in fact the opposite is true. Anna states that she is only using these people to help her stop procrastinating with her fitness. Furthermore, aside from being reported yelling instructions at her, none of the military personnel are quoted in any form throughout the text. They are represented as unimportant except with regard to their role to motivate Anna to undertake exercise. Liz Main’s article contains three references to people with job titles. The first two - Health Minister Rosie Winterton and Paul Farmer, the Chair of the Mental Health Fringe Alliance – are mentioned in passing, and are not quoted in any form throughout the article. The third person with a title, a police officer, is quoted directly. However, to negate his representation as an agent of power, Main gives him the ironic title ‘PC Plod of the Bournemouth Constabulary’. In ‘Being Different’ Geoff Adams-Spink writes about ‘The chairman of the disabled students’ association, Henry’. Interestingly, while the article contains references to Ugandan MP James Mwandha, a disabled politician who has been elected to represent the interests of disabled people, at no point does the author quote Mwandha or give him a full job title.

The use of job titles and quotes from the Crippled Monkey weblog is expected because the weblog’s brief (located in the top left hand corner of its pages states that the aim is to report on:

50 This includes direct quotes, indirect quotes, summary of speech, or the author’s interpretation of speech.
The latest snippets, half-heard whisperings and gossip about the disability scene and coverage of disability in the media. It would be distinctly difficult to fulfil this brief without using job titles. Within the eight Crippled Monkey articles, job titles are usually mentioned occur when the weblog is commenting on disability-related gaffs by non-disabled people. For example, in the 18 June, 2003 entry there is a quote from “Irish pop impresario Louis Walsh – one of the judges in ITV1’s *Popstars: The Rivals*” on how he considers the Special Olympics “a big ego trip” for some of the people who organise the events. The weblog gives Walsh a deliberately ironic job title in order to diminish the impact his comments will have. Many of his comments are paraphrased and generalised. The rebuttal comment from a representative of the Special Olympics, “Special Olympics Chief Executive Mary Davies”, is brief and succinct, and her job title is correctly written.

5.3.8 Orality

Many of the articles in the sample are written in an oral style. This could be a result of an influence of the medium of the internet. It could also be because the website’s authors have written with the knowledge that some of their audience may be using screen readers to access their articles.

A number of articles in the sample have clear instances of authors verbalising within the text. The weblog entry for 10 February, 2004 begins with the statement “This is where Crippled Monkey tries to sound like a pretentious music journalist…”. A later entry on that date ends with the exhortation “Go on, my son!”. Francesca Martinez notes in Mean Streets: “No, I’m talking about the problems other people give me!”. She ends the article with the statement: “What I’m trying to say is: can we please have some more disabled parking spaces”. In the article ‘My Family and Autism – Luke on Being Filmed’ the entire article is in speech quotes. Below many of the articles in the sample, readers are encouraged to post their views on the website’s messageboards with the statement “Talk about it”.

In addition to these obvious references to speech throughout the sample the writers have also used a number of more subtle methods to convey orality. A large number of articles contain short informal verbal asides directed at the reader. ‘My Family and Autism’ begins with a
short introduction. “Hi, I’m Luke Jackson”. Throughout the rest of the text, there are numerous asides to readers. In his article ‘Stan’s guide to ligging it’ Steve Palmer queries why people give up their place in queues to disabled people with the comment “Pity, perhaps? Sorry, I’ve done that one”. The second to last paragraph of Caroline O’Neill’s article ‘Just the Job?’ begins with the statement “I would love to tell you that I then embarked on a verbal sparring match with this advisor.” Ian Cook ends his article ‘The Best Bet Diet’ by farewelling the reader with the statement “‘Tara a bit,’ as they say in Brum.”

This oral style also frequently includes questions addressed to the reader. Paul Green’s article ‘Moses was disabled’ contains the aside “So what do you make of that…?” after an extended quote from the bible. The weblog entry for 20 October, 2003, ends with the statement: “Monkey wasn’t quite sure what to make of it – but what do you think?” Luke Jackson’s article ‘Back to school’ ends with an appeal to readers: “If there are any teachers out there reading this, PLEASE try my experiment”. The article ‘GPS to guide? Or guide to GPS’ by Liz Ball is written almost entirely in a question and answer format. Questions are put forward on behalf of a hypothetical visually impaired reader.

**5.4 In-depth critical discourse analysis of two articles**

The following section contains an in-depth analysis of two articles. It is hoped that this will present a deeper understanding of the representation of disabled people on Ouch.

**5.4.1 Introduction**

With regards to these two texts, this section of my analysis aims to address two questions:

- How are disabled people represented?
- What type of ideology and power structure is evident in the discourse used?

The two articles I have decided to analyse in greater depth using critical discourse analysis were chosen because the topic and author writing styles contrast each other. The first article, ‘Do I have to go to school today?’ is written by a non-disabled woman. It details the author’s decision to remove her son – who has Asperger syndrome - out of mainstream education and educate him at home. The article is both issue and personality driven (Clogston 1990, p.5).
The second article, ‘Holiday Diary: A White Man Abroad,’ is written by a disabled man. It is an account of what happened when the author went on a lads’ holiday to Tenerife. The article is personality driven (Clogston 1990, p.5).

5.4.2 ‘Do I have to go to school today?’ by Jacqui Jackson

This article is written by a non-disabled mother of seven children, four of whom are disabled. Her article discusses the reasons behind her decision to educate her son Luke at home. She also writes about Luke’s difficulties in mainstream education, and why she believes the mainstream education system is not meeting the needs of autistic children.

With the exception of Luke Jackson, disabled people are referred to in an anonymous and impersonal manner. No names, ages or circumstances are given with regards to these children. Below is a list of labels which are used to represent disabled people in the article:

Luke (13 instances), he (five instances), children (5 instances), children with autistic spectrum differences (2 instances), children on the autistic spectrum (2 instances), I, her son Luke, someone, children with special needs, those with Asperger’s, children with Asperger’s, child, square pegs, children on the spectrum with their own rigid way of living, children with AS, AD/AD or other hidden disabilities.

Throughout the article, disabled children’s states are frequently described using verbs which connote passivity. Disabled children are portrayed as being acted on rather than acting independently – “children on the spectrum… are squeezed to the point of destruction”, “I went in to sort out the problems and eventually he [Luke] was removed from games completely”, “The schools [sic] solution was to give him a laptop computer”. The only two instances in the text which describe disabled children in an active manner are Jacqui’s account of stories she has heard regarding other autistic children’s reaction to school, and her description of Luke’s behaviour after he began to be home schooled. In the first example, the children are described as “refusing to speak” and “picking their skin and digging holes in their arms to the point where they are bleeding”. The second example describes the change in Luke’s relationship with his family:

51 While the style throughout this dissertation so far has been to refer to surnames, because the mother and son both share the same surname, the author will be referred to only by her first name. For consistency, this will also apply to the references to the author in the in-depth analysis of the second article.
he now laughs and jokes and interacts fully with the rest of the family, washes voluntarily… and says that on a happiness rating scale of 1-10 – he rates at least 11! This last example is the only instance in the text in which a disabled person is given a voice. There are no direct quotes from disabled people in the article.

The majority of verbs relating to disabled people actions refer to mental processes. These fall into two categories. The first category is the sentences involving Luke’s relationship to his environment: “Luke was still not coping”, “Luke struggled… with the concept of homework”. The second category describes Jacqui’s thoughts with regards to autistic children in mainstream education: “Tales of children as young as 8 years old on antidepressants fill me with horror”; “my only bitter regret… is that I didn’t remove Luke from school sooner”.

Throughout the text, disabled children – and specifically autistic children - are frequently described as being out of place in mainstream education. Jacqui writes that “it seems that school and ‘disability’ do not mix.” Four times in the text, Luke is written about as having “struggled” with what is required in school. He is also described as “not coping” and “distressed to the point of despair”. For example, descriptions of Luke include:

- Having Asperger Syndrome (AS) means he has difficulty with communication, social interaction and imagination – all the things needed in abundance at school. Later in the text she writes:

Luke, like many AS children, also has coordination problems and so loathed games with a passion.

While the majority of the article details Luke’s personal situation, Jacqui also argues that the incompatibility between disabled and non-disabled children is a systemic issue. She comments that the overall system is responsible for the situation her and her son are in with regards to his education: “the blame lies nowhere other than with an under funded, inflexible system”. Furthermore, in the second to last paragraph in the article, Jacqui states that:

All over the world, there are adults and children who have been scarred by a failing education system.

There is an absence of official voices and formal titles throughout the article. Despite Jacqui attributing her son’s difficulties in school to the under funding and inflexibility of the
education system, there are no comments of any representatives from this system. The two representatives of power - teachers and the state education system - are given anonymous labels. They are also not quoted directly, indirectly or in summary.

Throughout the text, Jacqui uses a variety of anonymous labels for disabled children. Excluding her son Luke, none are mentioned by name. Non-disabled children and parents are also labelled anonymously, however they are given fewer different labels than disabled people are.

As the author has no personal experience of life as a disabled person, she draws on her experience as a parent of children with autistic spectrum differences to provide her with authority to back up her argument. She also uses a large amount of modality to soften the impact of her statements when she discusses topics on which she has made generalisations about. For example, with regards to parents’ actions she writes:

> whilst parents like myself *often* get bogged down with the weight of our mediator, negotiator, advisor and protectors hat, it *seems* as if there is no choice in any of this. [my italics]

She also notes that:

> If parents raise concerns of this nature [with regards to bullying] they are *often* labelled as overprotective

Sentences regard the actions of schools and teachers also contain a large amount of modality. Again this is in regards to generalisations. She writes:

> Some schools are willing to try and make concessions however, and *some* teachers do want to learn and *often* feel as helpless as the parents.

The author assumes a sympathetic reception to her point of view in the article. In paragraph eight, when Jacqui writes that parents do not need to have any qualifications to home school their children, this sentence is followed by the statement “Exciting news for many”.

5.4.3 ‘Holiday Diary: A White Man Abroad’ by Kevin McLaughlin.

This article has been written by a man with albinism. Presented in a diary format, Kevin writes about his holiday in Tenerife with a group of friends, and how his disability influenced his experience there. The overall tone of the article is intended to convey that while the
author has doubts about his ability to attract the attention of women compared to his non-disabled friends, by the end of the holiday he has managed to “pull with the best of ’em”. Kevin is the only disabled person referred to in the article.

Albinism is also written about as something which is ‘less than’ in comparison to non-disabled people. Kevin describes how he worries that he will not be able to compete in his friends’ snogging competition: “will I end up coming last … because of … because of … stuff.” He also ponders whether to dye his hair for the trip: “will it increase my pulling power if I look that wee bit more ‘normal’?” At one point he refers to his friends as “my perfectly normal mates”.

The physical impairments resulting from albinism\(^\text{52}\) are referred to using language which often contains elements of uncertainty or defensiveness. Kevin’s feelings about his impairment are presented as something that he wants kept hidden. In describing himself as having albinism, he notes he has “fair skin, fair hair and fair to middling paranoia that I largely keep under wraps.” These sentences also often contain either slang or irony. His concerns about burning in the sun are vocalised by his comment: “but I’m a white cap\(^\text{53}\) for crissakes, and I’m gonna fry like a sausage in all that sun, surely?” In the twenty-fourth paragraph he notes that he would be unable to recognise most of the people he is travelling with if they approached him. He then comments: “Sight problems? Me? No way!” In the twenty-eighth paragraph, he passes comment on thoughts he feels readers may be asking about a fall he had on the holiday:

I hear you ask: ‘Should a visually impaired person have been running along like that in badly constructed Spanish streets?’ That has nothing to do with anything, OK? I’m the most sightiest person in the whole world.

Throughout the article Kevin is represented as an active individual. In the majority of the verbs analysed for transitivity, he is writing about himself in the first person and using either action or mental based states. For example, in the twenty-first paragraph he writes: “I’m starting to get fed up with really bad quality vodka” and “I opt for drinking a few beers

\(^{52}\) These can include problems with vision and a tendency for skin to burn after prolonged exposure to sunlight. See http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/conditions/albinism.shtml for more clarification.

\(^{53}\) [author’s italics]
tonight instead”. The few instances of relational verbs are also largely written in the first person. These are mostly concerned with the influence of albinism - for example: “I’d have to accept them at face value because I’d never recognise them in a million years” and “Clubs aren’t the best environment for someone low on the sight spectrum, so I’m not sure what my chances inside would have been”.

Kevin’s feelings about his impairment are kept to himself throughout the article. Although he does mention getting advice from a colleague at work, at no other point is there any mention of him discussing his concerns with anyone else. There is one mention that “the lads seem to think that I will be topping the score chart by the end of the week.” However, this worries him and he writes: “So I can’t let them down. The weight lies heavy on my shoulders.”

There are no official voices anywhere in the article. There are also no official titles used. Furthermore, aside from his experience of life as a disabled person, Kevin is not represented as an expert or a representative of authority. There is no brief on the web page to describe Kevin, instead there is a pull quote situated to the left of the main headline. His lack of authority is reinforced by his tendency to refer to his impairment in casual lay terms – “one of those so-called ‘albino’ types” and “a white cap”.

Throughout the article non-disabled people are treated anonymously. With the exception of Mazza, the friends he is travelling with are usually referred to as variations on ‘mates’ – my mates, two mates, hockey playing mates, my mate, my mate Mark, and so forth. Apart from two instances – one in the third paragraph and then again in the twenty-fifth paragraph – his friends are not quoted directly, indirectly or summarised in the article. Women he meets on holiday are, with the exception of one woman, also treated anonymously and as ‘scores’ in his friends’ kissing competition.

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54 Some articles on Ouch have an ‘about’ section in the top left hand corner of the page, which lists facts about the author.
55 Author’s italics.
56 He refers to “a nice girl called Louise from Telford who liked my accent”.

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5.4.4 Comparison between the two articles

While these two articles are structured in different ways, have been written by authors with dissimilar backgrounds, and deal with different subject matter, there are also a number of similarities. In both articles disabled people are represented as ‘other’ and distinctly different from non-disabled people. There is an absence of official voices. Throughout both texts, non-disabled people\(^{57}\) are represented anonymously and their opinions rarely heard. Both authors are writing in a largely informal and oral-based style. There are a number of references and appeals to the reader throughout both texts. Personal narrative is central to both articles.

However, whether the author is disabled or non-disabled has resulted in some notable differences in language structure and representation. Firstly, because Jacqui Jackson is not disabled, she uses a number of methods to give her writing authority. She depends heavily on her experiences as a parent, and the experiences of her son, Luke. While she makes a large amount of generalisations in the article, she softens these with a large amount of modality. The second author, Kevin McLaughlin has a disability and thus relies less on establishing authority via other means. The site gives no background details about him, and he gives little information about his life within the article.

There are also differences in the representation of disabled people across the two articles. In the Jacqui Jackson article, with the exception of her son Luke, disabled people are treated anonymously and are largely represented as passive individuals. Disability is referred to using more specialised terms. In the Kevin McLaughlin article, while he represents himself more actively, he views his overall situation in isolation. There are no references to other people with albinism and his disability is generally referred to using casual language. Kevin also tries to keep his concerns about his impairment to himself.

\(^{57}\) This excludes Jacqui Jackson who wrote the first article.
5.5 Summary

The overall aim of this analysis is to examine how disabled people are represented on Ouch, what type of ideology and power structure is evident in the discourse, and how the medium of the internet might have influenced the content of Ouch, if at all.

With regards to the overall analysis of my sample from Ouch, disabled people are described using informal terms, humour, and often irony. When impairment and disability is described this tends to be through the use of generic and non-medical terms. The exception to this is the increased use of medical terms when non-disabled people are writing. The content of the sample features a large amount of different disabilities, both on behalf of authors and also the subject matter that they write about. While individual experience is seen as vital when writing about disability, authors often write about more disabilities than they have personally experienced. The exception to this is learning disabled people who do not write any articles within the sample. The large and diverse number of topics written about on the website presents disabled people as multi-dimensional people with varied interests. This also indicates that if disabled people are given the chance to represent themselves in the media, they will choose different topics than those selected by non-disabled society.

Disabled people are also represented on Ouch in distinctly different ways to how they are often represented within the mainstream media. Because disabled people are both the producers and writers of Ouch, they hold much of the balance of power and control with regard to how they are represented. Yet despite this, instead of positioning themselves as ‘official voices’, authors have chosen to represented themselves in an informal manner within the sample. Disabled people are referred to on a first name basis and rarely are mentioned with job titles. Instead, their authority and status is established both through their personal experience of disability, and through their control over how non-disabled people are represented on Ouch.

While this representation of non-disabled people is in direct comparison to that of disabled people on Ouch, it is also similar to how disabled people are represented in the mainstream press. Within the sample, non-disabled people are represented as an ‘other’, and are often
portrayed as anonymous and untitled people. Their opinions are rarely featured, and when they are, this is often in relation to disabled people’s actions. The reaction of non-disabled people to disabled people is often presented as unhelpful, stereotypical and unwanted.

The ownership and staffing of the website seems to have made an impact on article content in two other ways. Firstly, content relating to entertainment dominates the topics written about in the sample. This is unsurprising given Ouch is owned by the BBC website. Secondly, the amount of articles about visual impaired people appears to have been slightly influenced by the site’s producer Damon Rose, who is also visually impaired.

The medium of the internet appears to have had a significant impact on the style and content of the sample from Ouch. A sense of community is present in many of the articles. Authors refer to ‘us’, ‘we’ and the ‘disabled community’ and write directly to the audience. The website also encourages its readers to give feedback. In the sample, personal narrative and personal experience dominate the articles. However, it should be noted that this may be a result of the website’s aim which is to ‘reflect experiences’ 58. The use of orality is widespread across the sample. The audience is also regarded as largely loyal to Ouch. In comparison to other media – radio, press, and television – the internet offers a cheap 59, responsive, non-linear and flexible product that is able to be ‘owned’ by the people who read it. Furthermore, the medium of the internet offers Ouch the ability to target a specific audience – some of whom may have limited mobility – while also remaining accessible to non-disabled people.

Overall, the sample represents a rather exclusive picture of disability. Issues of class, gender are rarely mentioned. Homosexuality is not mentioned within the sample. Excluding one article, when the people written about are not white, they are then also not presented as British. Within the articles about Britain, ethnic diversity is not written about as having an

58 See www.bbc.co.uk/ouch/about
59 This is referring to the price of producing the website, and not how much it will cost disabled people to access it.
influence on how disability is perceived on behalf of either disabled or non-disabled people. It is instead seen as something exotic and in relation to travel abroad.

This leads me to my next chapter, the discussion and conclusion, in which I will relate the findings from my analysis to the theories discussed in the literature review, and reflect on the methods I have used to analyse Ouch. This chapter will also include a personal reflection on my dissertation.
6.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In examining the content of Ouch, I had three main research questions. These were:

- How are disabled people represented on the BBC website Ouch?
- What type of ideology and power structure is evident in the discourse used in articles on Ouch?
- How has the medium of the internet influenced the content of Ouch?

This chapter examines these questions in relation to the findings of my analysis. It also discusses a number of other key findings including: why Ouch offers up a different type of representation of disability, and the role of the medical and social models in this representation. This is following by a critique of my methodology and a personal reflection.

I conclude this chapter by restating the aims of the dissertation, summarising its contents, and examining further areas for research.

6.1 How are disabled people represented on the BBC website Ouch?

While there has been a change in mainstream attitudes towards the representation of disability and disabled people in the mainstream media, the situation is far from perfect. There is still a gap between how disabled people are represented in the media, and how they wish to be represented in the media. This is a point made in my interview with writer Kevin McLaughlin⁶⁰. He writes that he felt that the mainstream media does not represent albinism and disability anymore, particularly on television. As discussed earlier, Ross’s study But where’s me in it? identifies a number of ‘respect’ issues that disabled people have with the portrayal of disability and disability issues in mainstream broadcasting. I believe that many of these issues are not a factor in the sample of Ouch. The BBC’s decision to staff Ouch with disabled people (Matheson 2003)⁶¹ gives disabled people the opportunity to represent themselves in a different ways to that of most mainstream media. Ouch aims to offer a non-precious representation of disability that reflects and records life for people with a disability that bridges this gap⁶². This goal is reinforced by the BBC’s largely hands-off management

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⁶⁰ See Appendix 6.
⁶¹ See Appendix 4.
⁶² See Appendix 1.
of content on the website (Matheson 2003). These factors, combined with the decision to mostly publish articles written by disabled people on Ouch, means the content of the website is more likely to represent disabled people in ways they wish to be seen.

In addition to this, the representation of disability by disabled people on Ouch is found to be substantially different from that offered within the mainstream media. This suggests that if disabled people are given the chance to represent themselves in the media, they will do so in a different manner to that of non-disabled society. Throughout my sample from Ouch, the (mostly) disabled authors and their disabled subjects are represented as a multi-dimensional and active group of people who have many different personal experiences. Their opinions and feelings are quoted extensively. Across Ouch, impairment is referred to in a casual and often ironic way.

6.1.1 A critique
However, it should be noted that despite Ouch’s aim to transcend stereotypical representations of disabled people, a number of articles do not manage to do so. Within my sample, I found five articles which contain some references to passivity and struggle. While it could be argued that these states may be a reality of life for some disabled people, this type of representation could also work to reinforce stereotypical notions of disability.

Within the sample, ethnic or cultural diversity is not represented as being part of life as a disabled person in Britain. I believe this is an omission in the representation of disabled people. In the literature review, disability has been argued to be a social construct. Thus, class, gender and sexual orientation could be seen as influencing disability. While several articles in the sample discuss how ethnicity influences the life for disabled people in foreign countries, there is scant recognition of ethnic diversity within Britain. The same could be said for the role of gender, class and sexual orientation. In light of these factors, it could be argued that recognition of diversity is an important influence in how having a disability in

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63 See Appendix 4.
64 It should be noted that while there are no articles that mention sexual orientation within my sample, Ouch published two articles - ‘God bless text messages’ and ‘Gay and disabled: hard times or rich rewards’ – at the end of June 2004 to coincide with the Pride Rally and Big Gay Out. Aside from these two features, I could not find any other articles on Ouch which mentioned sexual orientation.
Britain is both experienced and portrayed. Furthermore, the tendency of authors to avoid mention of specific impairment and instead refer to generic “disability” means that diversity – through different impairments – is even further removed from the representation of disabled people.

6.2 Ideology and power in the discourse in Ouch
As stated within the literature review, control of language runs hand-in-hand alongside that of power and ideology (Fairclough 2001). The BBC’s decision to staff Ouch with disabled people gives disabled people a large amount of control over how disability and disabled people are represented on the website. This is borne out throughout the sample by the largely active and positive representation of disabled people. This is evident in the use of irony, humour and slang and the reclamation of previously negative words.

6.2.1 Authorship
Authorship is also found to influence the representation of disability within the sample. Each person who writes an article applies their personal experience towards how disability and impairment is represented. Within my sample, disabled people are found to portray disability and impairment in different ways to non-disabled people. They are less likely than non-disabled people to use medical terminology to refer to impairment. Disabled people are also more likely than non-disabled people to use informal language, slang and irony in order to describe impairment.

6.2.2 It is official – titles are out
On Ouch, the representation of power is most evident when comparing the representation of non-disabled people to that of disabled people. Within the sample, disabled people represent official and expert voices in different ways than I had anticipated. At the beginning of my analysis I expected that having disabled people controlling the content of Ouch would result in the establishment of disabled people as experts. While this has been proven to be so, the manner of this representation is somewhat different from what I thought it would be.
The authors’ experiences of disability, and often their own personal stories, are given more status than opinions from official voices and people in positions of power. Within my sample, non-disabled people are referred to in an anonymous and untitled way. They are also not quoted directly. When disabled people are given names, official titles or quoted or titled this tends to be in order to represent them in a negative way or to make fun of something they have said or done. In contradiction to this, disabled people are presented as ‘experts’ through their experience and knowledge of disability. When referring to disabled people, official job titles are not used to convey power or expertise with regards to disabled people. After their initial introduction, disabled people are mainly referred to by first name only. Their expertise of disability is usually mentioned in the short description of the author which is often positioned at the top left hand side of an article.

6.2.3 There is no escaping the mainstream

However, the difficulty of escaping mainstream ideology is also evident within the discourse on Ouch. Within my sample, there are several examples of negative and stereotypical representations of disability within my sample. These include the use of verbs which connote passivity and struggle, the representation of British disabled people as largely white, and ethnic diversity as largely foreign. Non-disabled people are also more likely than disabled people to write stereotypically about disabled people.

6.3 How has the medium of the internet influenced the content of Ouch?

As discussed earlier in this dissertation, Hine states that the internet is both a product of culture and also a place where culture is formed (Hine 2000, p.9). As such, the medium of the internet certainly has the potential to influence how disabled people are represented and perceived. Within the literature review, the impact of the internet was discussed as being either a solely negative or a solely positive influence with regards to disabled people. I have concluded that neither of these standpoints is completely applicable with regards to my analysis of articles from Ouch.
6.3.1 A sense of community
The medium of the internet has influenced the content of Ouch in a number of positive ways. It has helped to create a sense of community within a diverse community of people. As mentioned in the literature review, Costigan and Barnes see the internet as helping to create a sense of community amongst people who would not have otherwise met (Costigan 1999, pp.xvii-xix; Barnes 2001). This is certainly the case with Ouch. Many of the disabled people who frequent the website are from different places, have vastly different interests and different levels of impairment\(^\text{65}\). Throughout Ouch, articles refer to the audience by using inclusive terms such as “we”, “us” and “the disability community”. There are also numerous appeals and asides directed to the audience. The sense of community brought about by language use within the articles is further encouraged by Ouch actively encouraging its readers to discuss what they have read on Ouch in the website’s message boards. Paradoxically however, it may be that the generic language used on Ouch to create this disabled community is also working to obscure diversity within the website.

6.3.2 Creating an identity
The medium of the internet allows disabled people to create a representation of disability based on personal choice. Hine argues that the visual anonymity of the internet allows for people to play with their identity and adopt different personae (Hine 2000, p.118). Throughout the sample from Ouch, the authors chose to represent themselves most often as disabled people and not as people defined solely by their impairment. This representation is markedly different from that given in mainstream media, which most often chooses to represent disabled people in relation to impairment.

6.3.3 Responding to the audience
The medium of the internet also allows for an element of flexibility in responding to the needs and requests of its audience. Unlike traditional media, websites can update, alter and correct their content constantly. Throughout Ouch, there are indications that the staff actively seek and respond to the views of its audience. As indicated earlier by Ross (1997, p. 676) this is especially important when dealing with a sector of society which does not often have its point of view represented or sought within the mainstream media.

\(^\text{65}\) This has been ascertained through message board and reader contributions on the website.
6.3.4 Use of orality

The internet has resulted in instances of orality in text throughout the articles. McLuhan’s theory that new forms of media often drawing on styles from previous media (Meyrowitz 2003, p.199; McLuhan 1995, p.225) holds true when examining articles from Ouch. Many of the articles within the sample are written in an oral style. This includes authors’ addressing questions directly to the reader, verbalisation of thoughts in bracketed asides, and direct references of ‘talking’ to the reader. Below many articles the website also encourages readers to ‘talk about it’ on the Ouch message boards.

However, it should be noted that while this increased use of orality could be a result of an influence of the medium of the internet, it may also be because the website’s authors have written with the knowledge that some of their audience may be using assistive technologies such as Voice Output Technology or Optical Character Technology to access articles.

6.3.5 Telling tales

Poster’s argument that the medium of the internet encourages the publication of personal narrative and storytelling (Poster 1995) is borne out in the sample from Ouch. All the articles are written by people with a disability or with experience of disability in their family. Nearly all the articles in the sample contain personal narratives in the text. Again, this is especially important for a sector of society who rarely has their stories heard within the mainstream media. Of those articles that do not contain personal narrative, these include indications that the author may be writing from personal experience. For example, while both articles by Liz Ball do not include any personal narrative, the brief in the left hand column notes that:

Liz Ball has a personal interest in electronic navigation aids for visually impaired people, has previously trialed GPS equipment with blind people, and is currently studying for a doctorate in the field of orientation and mobility.

Kevin McLaughlin notes that his article ‘Holiday Diary: A White Man Abroad’ “was more about sharing an experience rather than [sharing] any specific message”. He writes:

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66 Both these technologies can involve the reading of text. See Williamson, Wright, Schauder and Bow (2001) for a list of assistive technologies available for blind and visually impaired people to access the internet.

67 Global Positioning System.
I wanted to write the piece to give people a perspective on how different an experience going on this type of holiday could be for someone with my disability… I wanted to share my experiences with other people, so that they could understand some of the issues I considered before going to Tenerife.⁶⁸

Within the sample, I found 16 articles which had no reference to personal narrative within them. However, it should be noted that eight of these were the sample from the weblog – because there is no identifiable author for these articles, it is very difficult to ascertain if there is any personal narrative within them. Therefore the true number of articles with no personal narrative could be as low as eight.

Furthermore, it should also be noted, while Poster’s theory has validity with regards to my sample from Ouch, the high incidence of personal narrative within the articles could also be a result of the lack of representation of official voices on the website. Because the majority of writers within the sample do not have the views of officialdom present in their articles to back up their statements, they may instead be authenticating and reinforcing their message by recounting personal experience.

6.3.6 Widening the technological divide?
The medium of the internet has also influenced the content of Ouch in a number of negative ways. In the literature review, it was proposed that the internet could be seen as serving the pre-dominantly non-disabled status quo in a way that maintains and legitimizes the oppression of disabled people (Goggin and Newell 2003, p.9). Within Ouch, control over production has a direct influence on content, as has been shown through the amount of entertainment related content within the BBC owned website. Furthermore, while Ouch reflects experiences of disabled people, it does so in a non-political way, and never directly criticises either the government or the BBC.

There is also evidence of exclusivity in the representation of disabled people on Ouch. This occurs through the limited amount of representation of diversity within the website. It is also evident in the technology and educational skills needed to access the website content. As

⁶⁸ See Appendix 6.
discussed in the literature review, disabled people are a largely unemployed and unskilled group of society. Because of this, some disabled people may not have the ability to access the internet. Thus any benefits from the positive representation would be lost on them.

Therefore, I believe that although the influence of the internet could be seen as either a positive or negative influence, it should be regarded as a technology which offers an opportunity to disabled people. As demonstrated through the analysis of articles from Ouch, this opportunity is dependent on the use of this technology, and what control disabled people have with regards to production.

### 6.4 Ouch, something different

In addition to the findings related to the research questions, a number of other key points need to be made. The BBC website Ouch offers a different sort of representation of disabled people than that offered by most other mainstream media organisations within Britain. The format and content of Ouch is also very different from other disability-centred websites in Britain. These websites are mostly sponsored by different companies including charities, government agencies, universities and research institutions and tend to be information and charity or advocacy based. Not only is Ouch a disability centred website funded by a major media organisation, but its articles aim to entertain rather than just provide information. Its content is structured in a non-political web-magazine style. As a result, on Ouch disabled people are represented as active individuals with diverse interests.

### 6.4.1 Of benefit to the BBC

The creation of Ouch does not just benefit disabled people through its representation of disability, it also benefits the BBC. Firstly, the website is promoting the BBC and the entertainment and leisure industry. Entertainment based articles dominated the sample content. Secondly, the website is fulfilling the BBC’s aim of catering for diversity. While the BBC is not commercial, the creation of Ouch is allowing them to capture a share of a market which has hitherto been ignored by the mainstream media. Unfortunately, I am unable to provide any information as to what share of the disability audience market Ouch

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69 See [www.bbc.co.uk/info/purpose](http://www.bbc.co.uk/info/purpose)
holds as this is deemed commercially sensitive. Thirdly, the website is allowing a disaffected group in society space to express their opinion, but in a style that is determined by the BBC.

6.4.2 A different approach to disability
As is discussed in the literature review earlier, the dominant model of disability amongst disabled people is the social model. The social model attributes disability to societal and environmental barriers. The main model of disability amongst non-disabled society appears to be the medical model. The medical approach views disability as a personal and individual issue and a medical one (Abberley 1997; Campbell 1990; Johnston 1997; Barnes 2003, pp.2-4; Shakespeare 1996) and not a social one.

Before analysing articles from Ouch, I had expected that most of the articles in my sample would reflect the social model of disability. However, this turned out not quite to be the case. Within the sample, disability is written about as an individual issue – 60.4 per cent of the articles in the sample are based on only the personal experience of the author only. In addition to this, while medical descriptions of impairment are rarely given within these articles, society is not attributed as being the cause behind disability. Instead, authors wrote about the reactions of individual non-disabled people to impairment more often than they did about politics or societal structures. Personal narrative predominates at the expense of the social model.

This throws up the question of whether either model is truly reflected in the content of articles on Ouch. Are the medical model and the social model the only viable options when theorizing on its representation of disability? Does either of these models completely reflect the reality of living with impairment and disability? It appears not.

Through my analysis of articles on Ouch, I believe that a third approach to disability is emerging. For convenience I will refer to this as the biopsychosocial model, an approach

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70 A point made in Matheson (2003), see Appendix 4.
71 This is a point also made in Sweeney (2003, pp.25-30).
identified by a World Health Organisation proposal (ICIDH-2 in Sweeney 2003, p27). This approach acknowledges that disability is dependent on both a person’s social environment and their experience of impairment (Sweeney 2003, p.27).72 The articles on Ouch largely adhere to the biopsychosocial model. With the sample, the authors view disability as a result of societal oppression, yet choose to illustrate this oppression and disablement mostly through recounting personal narrative and individual experience. However, it should be noted that this view of disability has more than likely been influenced by Ouch’s aim of “reflecting life as a disabled person”73.

6.5 Methodological reflections

6.5.1 Sample size
Because I am unable to find any study similar to my dissertation topic, choosing what methods to use and the size of the sample was problematic. Because of this, I have perhaps underestimated the amount of work needed to finalise my sample and the criteria for its analysis. In hindsight, I should have analysed a larger test sample of articles before settling on the sample size that I did. However, time restrictions meant this is not possible. Having a larger sample for the content analysis section of the study would have produced findings which are more representative of the website as a whole. This would not have disproportionately increased the amount of work that would have needed doing. A larger sample size would have also allowed me to investigate if the type of discourse and representation altered across different sections of the website. I also would have decreased the total number of articles that were to be analysed using this critical discourse analysis. This would have allowed me to examine these articles in greater depth.

6.5.2 Covering all the bases
The lack of information in the field of internet discourse with regards to disability led me to create analysis guidelines which cover a large number of topics. This has resulted in a large number of variables being examined in little depth – gender, impairment, production values,

72 Sweeney argues that this approach should be used to reassess the existing social model of disability. For simplicity’s sake, I have chosen to present the biopsychosocial approach as separate to the medical and social models.
73 See www.bbc.co.uk/ouch
ethnic diversity, reclamation of language, use of irony and so on. Further study which builds on the findings from my dissertation will perhaps be able to concentrate on one variable and examine it in greater depth. It would also have been interesting to include some audience-based research methodologies within this in order to closer examine how disabled and non-disabled people interpret the language used on Ouch.

6.5.3 CODING BIAS
It should also be noted that because the coding and analysis was done by me alone, this may have introduced bias into the results. While there was some double coding done during content analysis – I coded this section twice, the second time without knowledge of the original findings - it is impossible to remove bias completely. Furthermore, this type of bias is endemic to critical discourse analysis.

6.6 PERSONAL REFLECTIONS
My decision to study the representation of disability in this dissertation was a highly personal one. I first became aware of an imbalance in the representation of disability by mainstream media more than 10 years ago. Then, as a teenager with a disability I looked out into the media and the image of myself reflected back was more than inaccurate, it was just plain wrong. I also hoped that basing my study around a disability-based topic will help me to improve my lack of personal knowledge about disability theory.

Studying the articles on Ouch and interacting on the website’s message board has been illuminating and, at times, personally revelatory. It has led me to re-examine how I represent myself to others, and the positive influence that disability has in shaping my life. It has also challenged perceptions that I hold about myself with regards to disability.

6.7 CONCLUSION
The aim of this dissertation topic was to study the self-representation of disabled people in the media. Within this, I examined the content of www.bbc.co.uk/ouch, a BBC website about disability produced largely by disabled people.
My literature review highlighted problems in the ways that mainstream media currently represent disabled people. Within the UK, studies on representation of disability in the media tend to focus on content analysis, identifying disabling language and critiquing journalistic practice. As I was unable to find studies similar to what I was proposing to analyse in my dissertation, I chose to examine theories behind the study of disability representation in the media. This included disability politics and theory, current debates about language, an examination of three studies of media representation an examination of how disabled people perceive their representation by broadcast media, and the influence of the internet with regards to disability.

My method chapter established the framework to be used to analyse articles from Ouch. Sampling procedures, variables, and coding guidelines were set out. The methods of content analysis and critical discourse analysis were examined and critiqued. The application of this methodology to my dissertation topic was also critiqued.

Chapter five presented the analysis and findings from my study of articles from the website Ouch. Findings were organised into two sections: those from content analysis and those critical discourse analysis. Two contrasting articles were also examined. The differences in the representation of disabled people, and ideology and power in these two articles was discussed.

The discussion chapter related the research questions to the findings from the analysis and the questions which were raised in the literature review. This included why Ouch offers a different representation of disability, the application of the social model to the texts, the influence over control in production, and the influence of the medium of the internet. This chapter also included methodological and personal reflections.

6.7.1 Where to from here?
Because I could not find any similar studies to what I was attempting to undertake in my dissertation, the aim of analysis was constructed to cover as many different variables as possible. This was to create an overall picture of the representation of disabled people on the
internet. As a result, there are a number of avenues of investigation of further study which could be pursued. These include:

- How the audience of Ouch interprets the articles
- The use of language on the Ouch message board
- An analysis of design, layout of Ouch
- An analysis of video and graphics within Ouch
- The examination of disability-centric websites in Britain
- An analysis of reclamation of previously offensive language amongst disabled people
7.0 APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix 1 – Ouch job application

Assistant Content Producer
Ouch!
Location \ London
Three month contract from Feb 2004
Applications to be received by 5 January

Summary information

BBCi’s disability site Ouch!

... is an innovative, credible, genuinely interesting, humorous and accessible web magazine for disabled people. It has a fast turnover, reacts to events and frequently faces tight deadlines.

You will produce new areas of the website...

...in liaison with design and technical teams, as well as sub-editing and re-writing content from other sources to ensure suitability for the web. Manipulating electronic material such as text, graphics, video and audio files, and performing routine updates of existing output, including writing index pages and promo copy will also form part of the role.

You'll need a demonstrable track record of web production...

...incorporating web-authoring tools, HTML and Photoshop. Good writing and editing skills and impeccable editorial judgement are essential. A strong background in, or demonstrable enthusiasm for, disability news and issues is also required.

You can apply for this vacancy right now. Or if you’d like more information, read on.
JOB SPECIFICATION

Job Title: Assistant Content Producer, Ouch!
Department: Interactive Factual & Learning
Base: White City
Grade: 6D

A three-month attachment / contract on BBCi's disability site Ouch!

This position requires the successful candidate to start February 2004

Ref: 72300

AIM OF THE JOB

To assist in the daily production of the Ouch! website.

Has day-to-day accountability for:
1. Regular updating and the running of the site's output.
2. Ensuring timely delivery of material from content sources.
3. The running of the community area.
4. Assisting with specific project-related tasks.

CONTEXT

The aim of Ouch! is to provide an innovative, credible, genuinely interesting, humorous and accessible web magazine for disabled people. It has a fast turnover, reacts to events and frequently faces tight deadlines. Ouch! is not a resource centre, its editorial remit is to reflect and record disabled people's lives, from the serious to the light-hearted. It aims to redress the equality balance by putting a well-deserved gloss on disabled people through humour (often dark), comment, features. Ouch! says things that other sites wouldn't or couldn't say: it has the confidence to 'do' disability with flair.

ORGANISATION

Working to the Producer for Ouch!, the Assistant Producer will take responsibility for content updates, editing external contribution, and hosting the
message boards on Ouch!

MAIN DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Perform routine updates of existing output, including writing index pages and promo copy.

2. Collate content and material from other sources, such as TV production team and external contributors.

3. Produce new areas of the website in liaison with design and technical teams.

4. Sub-edit and re-write content from other sources to ensure suitability for the Web as necessary.

5. Manipulate electronic material such as text, graphics, video and audio files, converting these for use on the web or other interactive platforms and updating these as necessary.

6. Liaise with content sources to co-ordinate the required material for the content area’s output.

7. Liaise with relevant network/programme makers to ensure that content supports the Radio network/TV programme as appropriate.

8. Ensure that all relevant copyrights and contracts have been cleared and ensure that BBC output meets legal guidelines.

9. Promote content updates internally within BBCi.

10. Host community on message board.

11. Respond to audience feedback.

12. Source small sections of content or services as required.

13. Be aware of personal financial authority limits and ensure that this authority is exercised in accordance with BBC financial arrangements.

14. Work to the BBC’s policy on Health and Safety.

ESSENTIAL SKILLS, ABILITIES AND EXPERIENCE

1. Good writing and editing skills, impeccable editorial judgement gained through previous
experience.
2. Strong background in, or demonstrable enthusiasm for, Disability news and issues.
3. Demonstrable track record of Web production (Web-authoring tools, HTML, Photoshop skills)
4. Ability to commission effective and entertaining interactive content - articles, flash games etc.
5. Ability to work effectively with and get the best from designers and developers.
6. Confidence to take responsibility for and develop certain areas of the site(s)
8. Effective team-working skills, experience of working alone or in a team, maintaining good working relationships with colleagues.
9. Ability to communicate and liaise with external contributors and an excellent ability to make contacts and communicate effectively with individuals in and outside of the BBC.
10. Ability to generate and implement compelling ideas through a proven experience of understanding the needs of the target audience.
11. Strong interest in interactive media across a range of platforms.

COMPETENCIES

Analytical Thinking
Able to simplify complex problems, processes or projects into component parts, explore and evaluate them systematically. Able to identify causal relationships, and construct frameworks for problem solving and/or development.

Imagination & Creative Thinking
Is able to transform original or unusual ideas/impulses into practical reality. Can look at existing situations and problems in novel ways and come up with innovative solutions.

Planning and Organising
Is able to think ahead in order to establish an efficient and appropriate course of action for self and others. Prioritises and plans activities taking into account all the relevant issues and factors such as deadlines, staffing and resource requirements.

Communication
The ability to get one’s message clearly understood by adopting a range of styles, tools and techniques appropriate to the audience and the nature of the information.

Managing Relationships
Able to build and maintain effective working relationships with a range of people.

Influencing and Persuading
Ability to present sound and well-reasoned arguments to convince others. Can draw from a range of strategies to persuade people in a way that results in agreement or behaviour change.

Decision Making
Is ready and able to take the initiative, originate action and be responsible for the consequences of the decisions made.

Resilience
Can maintain personal effectiveness by managing own emotions in the face of pressure, set backs or when dealing with provocative situations. Can demonstrate an approach to work that is characterised by commitment, motivation and energy.

How to apply
For this job, the BBC will only consider applications from those who already have the right to live and work in the UK.

This is because in order for the BBC to apply successfully for a work permit, we need to show that there are no suitable candidates who are normally resident in the UK or who are nationals of the European Economic Area (EU States plus Norway and Iceland).

Under certain circumstances, the BBC may contribute to interview travel expenses from UK locations, provided the amounts are agreed with us prior to any travel booking being made.

Please note our recommended method of applying is using our online application form. The information sent to you by post is the same as the information on this page.

Apply online - using our quick and easy application form

Request an application form and pack by:
Phone: Call 0870 333 1330
Textphone: Dial 020 7765 1192

Applications to be returned by 5 January
7.2 Appendix 2 - List of sample articles

Ouch sample as of 1 June, 2004

1. Adams-Spink, G. ‘Being Different: Ugandan students on disability and relationships.’
4. Ball, L. ‘GPS to guide? Or guide to GPS?’
7. Batchelor, P. ‘Station Agent: a film from the right side of the tracks.’
8. Beddard, J. ‘Jamie Beddard is unwell… in India.’
10. Behrman, A. ‘Electroboy escapes death and deals with a new type of disability.’
12. Behrman, A. Electroboy: You’re a lunatic, a freak, a psycho, a crack-up and a mental case.’
13. Bowler, E. ‘Why climb every mountain?’
15. Clark, L. ‘Should we be laughing? Investigating disability and comedy.’
17. Cook, I. ‘The Best Bet Diet: Week 1.’
19. Cook, I. ‘Viagra Lovin’.’
20. Fraser, M. ‘Mat’s Evil Twin vs The Journalists.’
21. Green, P. ‘Moses was disabled.’
22. Hills, A. ‘The latest footwear craze?’
23. Jackson, L. ‘Back to school.’
24. Jackson, J. ‘Do I have to go to school today?’
26. Main, L. ‘Pyjama Girl is not brave.’
27. Martinez, F. ‘Mean Streets.’
29. O’Modhrain, S. ‘Accessible gaming.’
30. O’Neill, C. ‘Just the Job?’
31. Palmer, S. ‘Stan’s guide to ligging it.’
32. Papamichael, C. ‘Harry Potter and the Curse of Disability.’
33. Rose, D. ‘Every Time You Look At Me: Mat Fraser.’
34. Rosevear, A. ‘How to bypass your brain and get motivated.’
35. Sholl, L. ‘Going out on a limb.’
36. 2002, Crippled Monkey weblog, December, third week.
37. 2003, Crippled Monkey weblog, February, second week.
38. 2003, Crippled Monkey weblog, April, second week.
39. 2003, Crippled Monkey weblog, June, third week.
40. 2003, Crippled Monkey weblog, August, second week.
41. 2003, Crippled Monkey weblog, October, third week.
42. 2003, Crippled Monkey weblog, December, second week.
43. 2004, Crippled Monkey weblog, February, second week.
44. No author given. ‘Binding Love.’
45. No author given. ‘Desirability: Veracam.’
47. No author given. Student Diaries.
48. No author given. ‘What Are You Staring At? Iain Hutchison: Q&A’
"For children on the autistic spectrum, school is often a nightmare of confusion and chaos and as a parent of children with autistic spectrum differences, it has been my job to pick up the pieces and be the proverbial kicked cat."

Jacqui Jackson is the mother of the family featured in BBC TWO's 2003 documentary My Family and Autism. She has recently pulled her son Luke out of school due to ongoing difficulties with mainstream education, and chooses now to educate him at home.

"I've got stomach ache". "My head hurts". "I feel sick". I think most parents are familiar with these Monday morning moans. It seems that one of the unwritten rules for children is to moan about school and state how much they loathe the place whilst a parent's unwritten rule is to make placating noises whilst sending them anyway.

Nevertheless, whilst able to recall tyrannical teachers and bothersome bullies, most of us are also able to retell some good times even if it is only to remember the snogging behind the bike shed!

One of the unwritten rules of school it seems is that everyone has to conform. How they dress. How they speak. How they behave. These rules are embedded into the very heart of the education system and whilst most children learn to carve themselves a niche, some are just too fat, too thin, too short, too tall, too dark, too light - at school being different just ain't cool! -
From an early age, Luke has really struggled to cope with a school environment. Having Asperger Syndrome (AS) means he has difficulty with communication, social interaction and imagination - all the things needed in abundance at school!

Communication is a two way thing and whilst society may see those with Asperger's as the ones with the difficulties, surely the blame lies on both sides? For children on the autistic spectrum, school is often a nightmare of confusion and chaos and as a parent of children with autistic spectrum differences, it has been my job to pick up the pieces and be the proverbial kicked cat.

Whilst many parents like myself often get bogged down with the weight of our mediator, negotiator, advisor and protectors hat, it seems as if there is no choice in any of this, but there is!

Education may be compulsory but school certainly isn’t. Legally a parent is obliged to educate their child to their age and ability, but this does not necessarily have to be in a school. It is not compulsory for a child to follow the national curriculum nor is it compulsory for them to take exams. Furthermore, parents do not need to be teachers or have qualifications to teach their children at home. Exciting news for many.

Many schools refuse to acknowledge the differences of children with AS, AD/HD or other hidden disabilities and often bullying is not dealt with severely but seen as a 'toughening up' process. If parents raise concerns of this nature they are often labelled as overprotective and are told that the children seem fine at school. Much needed support is either withdrawn or not given due to funding issues.

Some schools are willing to try and make concessions however, and some teachers do want to learn and often feel as helpless as the
parents.

Luke, like many AS children, also has coordination problems and so loathed games with a passion. The games teacher gave him a differentiated programme. Luke was still not coping. Again I went in to sort out the problems and eventually he was removed from games completely - ideal scenario you would have thought?

Luke also struggled with handwriting. The schools solution was to give him a laptop computer - another perfect solution one would have thought. The only problem with this was that the 'laptop' was actually a Word Processor and one which had very blocky print and for someone so into computers, this merely added insult to injury. Not only that but it was also something extra for Luke to remember to carry around, and to get in trouble for when he forgot it!

Luke struggled not only with remembering to write down homework, but also with the concept of homework - school being for school and home being for home. After trialling many methods, accommodations were made so that extra work was done at school and the teachers wrote in a diary what he was to do. Seems perfect, eh?!

Despite such accommodations, Luke is now home educated. Distressed to the point of despair, school just did not work for him. Whilst some schools refuse to make any concessions, these illustrations of flexibility at Luke's former school serve to highlight the fact that sometimes, regardless of effort made, nothing works.

Perhaps the only thing that would work is for a parent or carer to follow the child around and iron out the inevitable misunderstandings between pupils and teachers?? Totally impractical of course!

All too often it seems that school and 'disability' just do not mix - particularly a 'hidden disability' such as an autistic spectrum difference. It's
ironic that as the school system becomes more and more rigid, so children on the spectrum with their own rigid way of living, are squeezed to the point of destruction.

So where does the blame lie? The teachers? The children? The parents? Often whilst each seeks to blame the other, the blame lies nowhere other than with an under funded, inflexible system.

Since I removed Luke from school, I have had emails telling of children with Asperger's attacking their parents the minute they come through the school gate. I have heard tales of children refusing to speak and withdrawing to their rooms for hours on end. Tales of children as young as 8 years old on antidepressants fill me with horror and reports of children who are picking their skin and digging holes in their arms to the point where they are bleeding runs shivers down my spine.

I am not an expert or even well established in the whole home education way of life, and certainly do not profess to be. I have a lot to learn and look forward to doing so. One thing I can say though is that in the few short weeks that Luke has been out of school, the changes in him have to be seen to be believed.

He now laughs and jokes and interacts fully with the rest of the family, washes voluntarily (unbelievable I know!) and says that on a happiness rating scale of 1-10, - he rates at least 11!

He 'socialises' far more than when he was at school as he can now choose who he mixes with. The difficulty now is keeping up with all his activities!

All over the world, there are adults and children who have been scarred by a failing education system and my only bitter regret and one that I have to live with for the rest of my life, is that I didn't remove Luke from school sooner and put a stop to the daily torture he was enduring.

I cannot blame the teachers, nor the pupils, nor Luke, nor even myself (though it is hard not to) for the difficulties Luke encountered at school. Sometimes square pegs just do not fit into
round holes!

If you want to discuss your views on this article, visit the Ouch! messageboard and let us know what you think.
7.4 Appendix 4 - Notes from interview with Vaughan Simons (V) and Damon Rose (D) about Crippled Monkey weblog (Ouch! website), by Dr D. Matheson.

D: It’s quite important in its own little way.

Let’s start there: who created crippled money?
D: Who contributes: it’s either myself or Vaughan or it might be Kate, whoever’s working on the website at the time. Why did we create this character...

V: The reason we started the weblog was I mean we’re quite a magaziney site, in that way we’re quite different from most BBC sites, certainly the ones in our department, Interactive Factual and Learning, which are all very much I suppose you’d say sources of information and factual, whereas we’re quite a bit more magaziney. And we found when we were putting things together that we have a little story there, we’d see a headline somewhere else and we couldn’t really put them in our news section. There weren’t really enough to write a full feature about and talking about it we thought the weblog format might work. I’ve been running a weblog personally for nearly 3 years now (totally separate, in my own webspace and everything) and so had quite a bit of knowledge about it from that and it just seemed like a good format and we noticed also that various BBC sites were doing their own weblogs—Scotland were doing Scotblog and the Games site have on and News seemed to be picking up on it a lot do various things. Nick Robinson had one before he defected. It seemed like something the BBC had picked up on and it seemed like a good way for us to put together all these little snippets, stuff which we couldn’t put elsewhere on the site.

D: Some of the things that amused us and excited us and made us chuckle in the office were wouldn’t fit well within news so we created the space. The whole website the other function I suppose in its own little way of our weblog is to expand on disability culture in a lot of ways to get people thinking around disability in a lot of different ways. Alright, our news section is quite obviously a series of links to other news organisations, to the BBC and elsewhere, so it could be a cure for autism found, blind man does amazing breaks landspeed record, or whatever, and then you’ve got the weblog. Yesterday we put something on a stupid thing about we discovered a website where there was a mill way up north called Heather Mills, so we put that on there—we thought that was quite amusing. We see there was this thing called Special Needs by Placebo so we wondered again we were appropriating that for disability culture, perhaps in a way that people wouldn’t think of. It’s our way of teasing out almost everything and giving it a disability slant because I keep saying disability is out there it’s involved in everything, and the weblog really helps us do that. It sorts of adds to the culture...

V: I think the sort of site we are it’s not a matter of being saty on for various things. We’re fairly out there, we have got something called Disability Bitch which again is not your standard sort of BBC thing. I don’t think it’s anything really anything to do with stuff...

D: We’re not really controlled. We don’t have a sense of control. Our bosses trust us in what we do about disability. Sometimes they don’t understand us, but they trust us.
V: We’re part of this department here is called interactive and factual learning which is part of Factual and Learning division so in programme terms we do all the sort of documentaries things like that. In website terms we’re in the same department as history, the big history site, health, science all that sort of…This used to be the education websites department, a few years ago it was known as digital media and education, we did all the education websites, it’s now changed its name.

Is ouch linked to broadcast output?
D: Most of the BBC’s websites are linked to programmes. We stand alone. When there is a disability related programme we tend to support it, we also push some aside that are not really in our keeping.

Seen as second class to bcast? Any sense of that in where you fit in BBC? Are things like this website marginalized?
D: You have to ask DCMS and the Broadcasting Select Committee. It’s still a growing media, I know Ashleigh Highbury and others are looking at interactive television and so on, as everybody is, and trying to work out what is going to be the most important platform in years to come. In terms of where we are now, I don’t think it might be easy to say the BBC has an uneasy relationship, but it’s not. It’s quite complementary, really.

V: I think in other terms people I know who work on some I don’t think there is, if they’re working on a big programme then 9 times out of 10 the online would be a big part of it. It doesn’t really apply to us because we don’t have any constant programmes that go to air. We get a programme every now and then that we cover but it’s rather a different relationship. I’d say generally across this and other departments online is badged as, sort of, not necessarily but sometimes regarded as, oh we’ll do a bit of online as well.

D: It is all part, I can’t remember who it was, there was a dictat a couple of years ago. Someone was saying we absolutely have to use online together with TV programmes, 360 proposals.

Resources?
V: no we didn’t use too many resources (laugh)

D: We were quite new at the time

Run it past people?
V: I don’t think we ran that one past anyone else.

D: We didn’t run it was anyone, we didn’t mention that we’ve got this rather insulting character called Crippled Monkey that you can see as rather insulting. We get quite a free hand, they do see as the experts and trust our judgement a little.

V: Also because the set up of it is sort of by web terms pretty basic. We don’t use any of the well known weblog engines, it’s just basically flat html where after a couple of weeks we
tend to take a couple of entries off the bottom and stick a new one on at the top so in that sense it’s based on our standard page template and didn’t take a lot of time to sort of set up.

D: Disability World.org voted Ouch the best disability entertainment site for 2002, and particularly noted that, He said, who else would bring up two characters called Disability Bitch and Crippled Monkey. We thought that was really good, and particularly that we’re perceived as not particularly precious about disability.

*Hits?*

V: We can’t release that kind of thing.

D: The news section probably gets more hits. I’m no sure people know what a weblog is, what to expect behind that link.

V: I guess that sort of surprised me, I don’t know why I thought this. I thought that when we started this there’d be sort of quite a few weblogs out there by disabled people. We’ve found a few but not many.

D: We really wanted to showcase some weblogs alongside our weblog, which is a very typical blogger thing to do, but they’re not there, it’s really really hard. I spent a whole afternoon doing it and only came up with three weblogs by disabled people.

*A particular role in disability culture? Is weblog one way?*

V: Well it would be nice to feature other weblogs but it’s not become a very easy thing to do to feature other weblogs. Part of it is that I other communities as it were you have community gossip and trivia and all that sort of thing, you know we called it news gossip and trivia, I think that’s part of it. That’s part of it that there’s equal amounts of gossip and trivia about all sorts of things, whether it’s Julian Coates planning to release an album called Spazareth or Gareth Gates having an affair with Jordan, you know, it can all fit in there.

D: There’s this confusion about disability—who fits the label, and what is appropriate for a disability website and we claim Gareth Gates for disabled…whether he considers himself disabled I don’t know. We believe that Stuart Hughes the journalists who lost his legs…[he wasn’t happy] he mentioned in his blog and as [part of an article. Again, we consider himself disabled and whether he does or not lots of disabled people out there would identify with him, who lost their legs. We were actually a little surprised. We are a particularly playful website, and we know that, but we thought we did a fairly straight article about him and his blog and…

And he talked a lot about disability yet he didn’t identify with disability. We obviously identify with disability our blog identifies with disability in rather random sort of way.

V: I think one of the things we want to do with Crippled Monkey which we can’t do in other places is the news page is fairly straight as it were occasionally we put in a comment like Ouch says this is the blind hero of the week story but mostly it’s fairly straight journalism. What we have done with Crippled Monkey and what we have done quite a lot apart
obviously from the trivia is outstandingly bad journalism that’s out there of which there is sadly quite a bit (and you’ve got a humorous take on it as well)

D: Disability stuff is often rant and ravey and what we’re doing is not that. It’s not politically correct. We accept that people have rights, that access is a right, etc etc and so any bad attitude with journalism is seen as weird post, as post-ironic really.

*Ironic tone?*
V: It has to be with a name like Crippled Monkey. I think if we wanted to be more straightforward we would have just called it the Ouch weblog but to actually have the character which when we remember to refer to it…

D: It could be quite ranty, a lot of other disability websites are quite ranty and weblogs often are ranty, quite political, but we’ve deliberately gone against that, we’re post-political. If non-disabled people say funny things we still laugh at them, we don’t say, make your complaints here.

*Free hand?*
D: Yeah, I think so. I’ve spoken to people, like people in editorial policy, the other week and she said, she often gets calls from people saying are you aware of this website, they say the most outrageous things, can they really call people spastic, can they really do that? We feel comfortable and they do trust us.

*Trouble from activist groups?*
D: But we’re on their sides as well, though, We do give the odd nod towards them we placebo last week their new single Special Needs we said it was quite ironic and let’s get in on that, special needs is and there I think we mentioned other songs like Spasticus Autisticus, that Ian Jury wrote that was a disability nathem but we also gave a nod towards a small part of the disability movement of highly politicised people by mentioning Ian Stanton who was a disabled folk singer who died in the late 90s who wrote a song that from that part of the community would know called the Glee Club so we do try to do something for everyone.

V: I think that’s part of the guidelines. That comes down to things like the links to, we have to abide by guidelines about not linking to highly…although we’ve got the standard BBC disclaimer about not being responsible for the content of external websites that we don’t link to sites with huge amounts of advertising or inappropriate sites kind of thing you have balance there as regards editorial as well so it’s not just digging up Placebo but you get a chance to mention other songs and political songs. I think there’s that sort of balance as well.

*Do you think consciously?*
V: I think to a certain extent that’s always in the back of your mind when you’re working on a BBC site there’s a certain amount of balance but it’s not up front in the foremost state of your mind but you have to be aware that you’re doing a BBC website and you can’t do certain things. I don’t know about…
D: We wouldn’t put in that there’s a demo happening in Notting Hill Station get out there with your banners that would be going a bit too far I think calling people out to direct action which could lead to legal action. But we try to go down the middle of pleasing everyone in some respects sometimes but we also very much enjoy going our own sometimes

V: And we were really pleased when we got an upset comment in the duty log one time

D: When we get in the duty log we tend to I think rightly think that we’re doing our job properly because we have broken through that preciousness barrier and we have said that make people think or use words that we think disabled people should be reclaiming like spastic, we use them unapologetically. If you look at the producers guidelines I suppose in the strictest sense of the word the way we use it might contravene the producer’s guidelines.

V: It would in any other site but in the context we’re doing this site it’s OK. I mean I think there’s all sorts of ideas of editorial balance, I mean the fact that we talk about disabled people but there’s always a huge range of disabilities and we have to be careful, we might have two blind people on the home page today

D: We’re a bit worried about that, might have to do something about that, to get some balance in there.

D: We do think about what we call impairment mix. We wouldn’t have a whole page of blindie stories, we wouldn’t have a whole page of deafy stories, we’ve got little names for them, blindies, deafies, wheelies and learnies. We try to, and that’s about inclusiveness, we’re trying to make everyone feel that this, and this is political, it doesn’t matter what your impairment is the thing that everyone shares is the same kind of oppression, through trying to get a job, and on that level everyone can identify with what this website’s doing. Whether you use the word disabled or not. The oppression and the silliness of non-disabled people sometimes and that’s what Ouch is about, that’s where it’s name’s from, and the weblog laughs at journalism.

*Ethos of the whole site?*
D: I think particularly for the weblog?

*Big question: is this journalism?*
V: Have we ever actually ever used the word journalism, I don’t think we have

D: Journalists are those people who are trained and go to journalism school aren’t they and …yeah of course it’s journalism.

V: journalism, new journalism, media new media, whatever you call it. New journalism comes with new media

*So what id do you claim? Journalism?*
V: I’d say that certainly the case of Ouch and Crippled Monkey it’s journalism. I’ve read interminable boring webloggers going over this boring weblogging is journalism argument. I
mean I think some weblogging is journalism but a lot of them are quite personal and I don’t see quite how that can be journalism, I don’t regard my own personal weblog as journalism but I would regard what Ouch is doing as journalism. Because it’s easier to explain in the case of my site. Mine is thoughts observations it doesn’t actually go out there looking for stories, I mean that’s what we do on Crippled Monkey we’re going out there looking for stories and commenting on them and that’s something I don’t do and so in that case it’s got anything to do with the BBC, Crippled monkey could exist outside the BBC and would still be journalism if it was doing what it’s doing. So that’s the difference, it’s actually going out there looking for stories and commenting on them, in that sense it’s journalism.

Are you engaging audience differently? Feedback?
D: I think people feel they can contribute to the weblog and gives us their views and we encourage people to do that. Not a huge amount but we do. We prompt people sometimes and have prizes.

V: And I think they’re more willing to do that than perhaps certain bigger things where we’ve tried to get contributions and people can see it’s weblog it’s a short entry just a couple of ideas or whatever whereas it’s a lot less commitment and time for them than to write a feature for Ouch which obviously if you sit down and write 800 words is a big deal. You send in a quick idea about something that we can develop on or not.

D: Or we get a message from a disabled colleague at the BBC saying have you seen this with a url and the idea there is write something on your weblog about this and that’s what it is. News, people look at our news site differently, TV or radio when we support it different people look at it because obviously they look at the website after seeing the url on the show. The features unlike the weblog the features are easier to link to than other parts of the website.

Young people?
D: We do aim at a younger audience. No one’s paid for us to do a demographic survey yet we’ve only been running a year. So the only easy we know is through comments. The majority of people are of that sort of target.

Started June 17 2002. weblog started end of November, something like 28th.

D: You were trying to convince me of it at that time, because I’d never really heard of the weblog.

Issue that people don’t know?
V: I think in our case it wasn’t the idea of the weblog that came first, it was the idea that we needed somewhere to put these bits and pieces that we came across that didn’t really fit anywhere and that kind of matched up with our weblog.

D: We always said Ouch is about the stuff you say to people down at the pub and the weblog personifies that really in a lot of ways.
Good not to talk about Iraq?
V: We haven’t found a disability slant on it yet but as soon as we do

D: As soon as Salam Pax goes an injures his big toe we’ll have him. One of our staff wanted a weblog entry on Noush of Big Brother, As soon as Noush of Big Brother injured herself broke the thigh bone on her knee they said she’s not going to walk for 18 months, Kate who was working with us at the time said oh put that in as a weblog entry, she’s disabled.

V: We like claiming disabled people even temporarily.

D: yeah, David Beckham and his metatarsals

V: That happened just before we launched, we just missed it.
KEVIN SAYS ...

“What the hell was I thinking about with all that hair dying rubbish? I can pull with the best of 'em ... and no real sun issues to speak of either!”

BBCi LINKS

If Tenerife sounds like your perfect getaway destination, check out the BBC’s Holiday site for more information.

BBC Health’s guide to protecting yourself in the sun.

RELATED LINK

Ready to party? Here’s a handy guide to night life in the Canary Islands.

Thursday 17 July

I have less than one week to go before my first ever sun and fun lads’ holiday, and nerves are already attacking me. I'm one of those so-called 'albino' types - fair skin, fair hair and fair to middling paranoia that I largely keep under wraps - and until now had felt that solo city breaks to north European destinations were more my cup of tea. I don't quite know how I've had my arm twisted into doing this, but I have.

The persuasive talk went something like:

"Come on Kev, let's all go to Tenerife! Swim, tan, get off our faces, dance a lot and score with girls ...” (That was my pal talking, and he's bringing along his hockey playing mates!)

Friday 18 July

One day closer, and I’m a mixture of laddish lust and albinoid anxiety today.

I like the sound of my pal's point-scoring game wiv da ladies, but I'm a white cap for crissakes, and I'm gonna fry like a sausage in all that sun, surely?

Talked about the latter at work today and a colleague urged me not to forget to use sunblock on my belly button and feet; he’d had an unfortunate incident himself and drilled into me that if I use sunblock all over then it will all be fine.
Saturday 19 July
How am I gonna compete? Am I going to be able to keep up in the pulling game? We're all expected to compete with each other in our drinking and pulling activities. Can I score as many points as my mates? Or will I end up coming last ... because of ... because of stuff.

Hold on Kev, need to get some perspective here. I have a good personality. I'll be fine. In fact, the lads seem to think that I will be topping the score chart by the end of the week. So I can't let them down. The weight lies heavy on my shoulders.

Sunday 20 July
Shall I dye my hair to increase my pulling chances? Or maybe I should just leave it as it is?

The big risk with dye is that I have to find one which (a) won't react badly with my hair, and (b) won't suddenly change from blonde to yellow or green on contact with chlorinated water or the sea. Hmm, but will it increase my pulling power if I look that wee bit more 'normal'?

I didn't realise that going on holiday could present so many issues for me.

Tuesday 22 July
It's departure day and I have had my hair chopped. I still haven't committed to dyeing it yet, but I have packed the dye in my bag and I've brought a hair sample with me just in case.

The first thing we decide to do when we arrive at our hotel at 1.30am is to search for a pub. After an hour trekking around the empty streets of Playa de las Americas looking for somewhere suitable, we finally locate a Plastic Paddy Pub - which is very disheartening for a real Irishman like me. We have a few pints, and then it's back to our hotel to take advantage of a few hours sleep before we set off in the morning to find even more pubs. I am realising that drink will play a large part in this holiday.

Wednesday 23 July
Our first night out involves drinking as much as we can possibly consume without falling over. It
Hello Kevin,

1. **What prompted you to write this article?**
   
   I wanted to write the piece to give people a perspective on how different an experience going on this type of holiday could be for someone with my disability. I have never been on this type of holiday in the past, so I wanted to share my experiences with other people, so that they could understand some of the issues I considered before going to Tenerife.

2. **Why did you decide to submit your article to Ouch instead of other media organisations?**
   
   (did you also submit it to other media organisations, and if so, which ones)
   
   I only submitted it to Ouch because I was already working with the BBC, so I was aware of the Ouch! site and thought that it would be of Interest to those who use the site. I also experienced problems that even I didn’t expect (problems with sunburn) despite taking all the necessary precautions.

3. **What message, if any, did you hope to put across within this article?**
   
   I think it was more about sharing an experience rather than any specific message. However, I do think that the message which, probably came from the piece was that people with a disability have to almost perform a military exercise to ensure that things go to plan. I tried to do as much research about the place I was going to before I went. This is always the case when I travel abroad, particularly if I’m going by myself, which wasn’t the case in this instance.

4. **How do you feel the mainstream media represents disability, and in particular people with albinism?**
   
   They simply don’t seem to represent it anymore, particularly on television. The BBC as the national public service broadcaster are failing to represent the views of disabled people due to a lack of commitment to cover the subject. Previously they had a positive attitude to the portrayal of disabled people on television. A change in the management structure seems to have altered this to a large extent. I think that many of the senior people in television are afraid of disability. The way they seem to choose to deal with this is to ignore it and hope it goes away. However Channel 4 are at least making efforts to commission independent production companies to produce programmes which look at particular aspects of disability. I think ITV have approached disability in the same way as the BBC, they are more interested in TV that isn’t very challenging or inspiring.
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