



"PROTECT OUR CHILDREN": THE PARALLELS OF TRANSPHOBIA AND ANTI-AUTISTIC ABLEISM

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INTRODUCTION

- A significant portion of trans people, including myself, are autistic (Thrower et al., 2020; Van Der Miesen et al., 2017; Wattel et al., 2022)
- **Other groups have taken notice of this overlap:** one group consists of **medical and psychiatric professionals** who seek to find the 'cause' of both transness and autism, while the other is made up of **anti-trans activists**, who have found new firepower in weaponizing autistic trans people's autism against us (Hsu, 2022; Thrower et al., 2020; Van Der Miesen et al., 2017; Wattel et al., 2022)
- These discourses **do not happen individually**, but as disability and trans scholars have pointed out, **"drift" into each other to neutralise threats to white cisheteropatriarchy** (Hsu, 2022)

RESEARCH QUESTION: How do anti-autistic and transphobic discourses interact?

METHODOLOGY

- For data analysis, I conducted a **critical discourse analysis (CDA)** of (N=28) **public Facebook posts**
- The selected posts **had to fulfil 4 distinct criteria:** a.) they each had to have had over 100 "reactions;" b.) they had to have been posted after 2016; c.) they had to consist of transphobic and/or anti-autistic content; and d.) they had to be visible to those without a Facebook account
- After initial inductive coding in Excel, themes were compiled to create a set of common transphobic and ableist arguments
- The arguments in each group were synthesized with their parallel argument from the other group **to show the ways transphobic and anti-autistic ableist discourse overlaps**

KEY FINDINGS

Adult trans/autistic activists are purposefully ignoring reality

- Activists were commonly posed as denying biology and medical fact to push an agenda: trans people were denying 'basic' biology of the sexes, while autistic people were denying that autism was a diagnosable condition in which one suffers
- Both autistic and trans people were seen as incorrectly claiming their 'pathologies' to be identities, a stance rejecting the possibility of agency over one's gender or neurodiversity

Adult trans/autistic activists are unreasonably aggressive and manipulative

- Adult autistic advocates accused of bullying and trying to silence 'innocent' Autism Moms "trying their best" who were just "sharing their stories and educating the public" about their children
- Anti-trans activists spoke of being targeted and silenced by "violent mobs" of trans people and allies for daring to speak out about the issue
- Activists' actions painted as manipulating their followers to make money or acquire social capital, not as legitimate advocacy

Overcoming one's 'pathology' is to be celebrated

- Autistic youth who participated in activities favourable to capitalism, such as working a job or hyperfocusing on organizing a shelf, were featured in news stories and viral posts that celebrated their performance 'despite' their autism
- Anti-trans detransitioners were framed as those who 'escaped' or 'woke up,' and therefore were an authority on the issue

Children must surrender their agency to adults for their own safety

- Anti-trans arguments centered around "protecting our children" from mutilation, predatory trans people, and corruption
- Autistic children conceptualized to be dangers to themselves, either because of violent stims or because of inability in varying functions, needing an adult caretaker 24/7

The non-normative child is the cause of their parent(s)' suffering

- Autistic children were routinely talked about as burdens (at least initially), where raising them was "difficult" and "exhausting" or a "lesson in patience"
- Trans children who got away from transphobic and abusive parents were said to be "stolen by gender ideology," and making their parent(s) suffer for just "insisting [their] child was [their assigned gender at birth]"

Children do not have the capacity to make educated decisions about their identities or bodies

- Dysphoria is theorized to actually be a result of another issue, like mental illness or neurodiversity, and therefore transitioning is not the 'correct treatment'
- Autistic children are produced to be socially inept and desperate to fit in, and as a result, 'vulnerable' to "social contagion"

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CONCLUSION

- Both transphobic and anti-autistic ableist discourses **use the innocent child as a main rhetorical strategy**, which is a powerful and universal image to organize around
- Children in these discourses are given no agency or autonomy, are produced as one-dimensional beings, and become the property of adults **to avoid nuance and preserve this image of innocence**
- Marginalized adults advocating for themselves are **infantilized as being immature, aggressive, or unintelligent** to dismiss their concerns

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