An exploration into how Students with Dyslexia identify with their condition, with particular reference to the tensions which surround Public and Private Perceptions of Dyslexia

By

D A Shenton

A Thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth in partial fulfilment for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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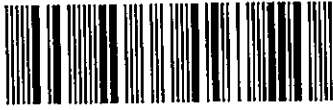
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Abstract

This thesis, discusses the implications of the social and private constructions of dyslexia for the individual with dyslexia and the dyslexic identity. In view of the difficulties inherent in higher education this study interviews people with dyslexia who successfully entered degree courses at university. It explores their experiences in an effort to gain an understanding of how people with dyslexia form an identity.

Issues surrounding 'dyslexia' have increasingly focused on its credibility as a 'genuine' medical and disabling condition. The social expectations of the condition and the differing social and medical models of conditions warranting the label 'disability' have complicated issues further. Thus far, research into dyslexic issues has mainly focused on the causation and remediation of the condition and although studies have exposed certain tensions surrounding social expectation of those with conditions deemed to be disabling, how people who describe themselves as dyslexic identify with their dyslexia as adults has been largely ignored. In view of the tensions surrounding social expectations of and certain official definitions associated with dyslexia, this thesis explores how individual's identify with their dyslexia in view of dominant perceptions of dyslexia, which is further identified through media portrayals of dyslexia and their own experiences of living with this condition.

The study consists of a discourse analysis of the representations of dyslexic issues in newspaper articles. Findings discuss how representations of dyslexia are described within the context of 'inability' and how individuals are often identified as 'victims' of the condition. The onus was often on finding a 'cure'. However, the study also includes accounts of individuals who referred to social barriers which had impacted on their learning.

The study carries out a discourse analysis of semi-structured interviews with students who are attending university and describe themselves as dyslexic, and investigates public representations of dyslexia informed through newspaper articles which refer to dyslexia and those labelled dyslexic. The findings reveal that media portrayals of dyslexia often associate it with inability or a lack of ability to achieve in reading and writing skills. However, many of the participants believed their dyslexia to be a benefit or gift, yet were often hesitant to disclose these beliefs to public scrutiny. The study also found that some of the men and women in the study often interpreted their experiences differently from each
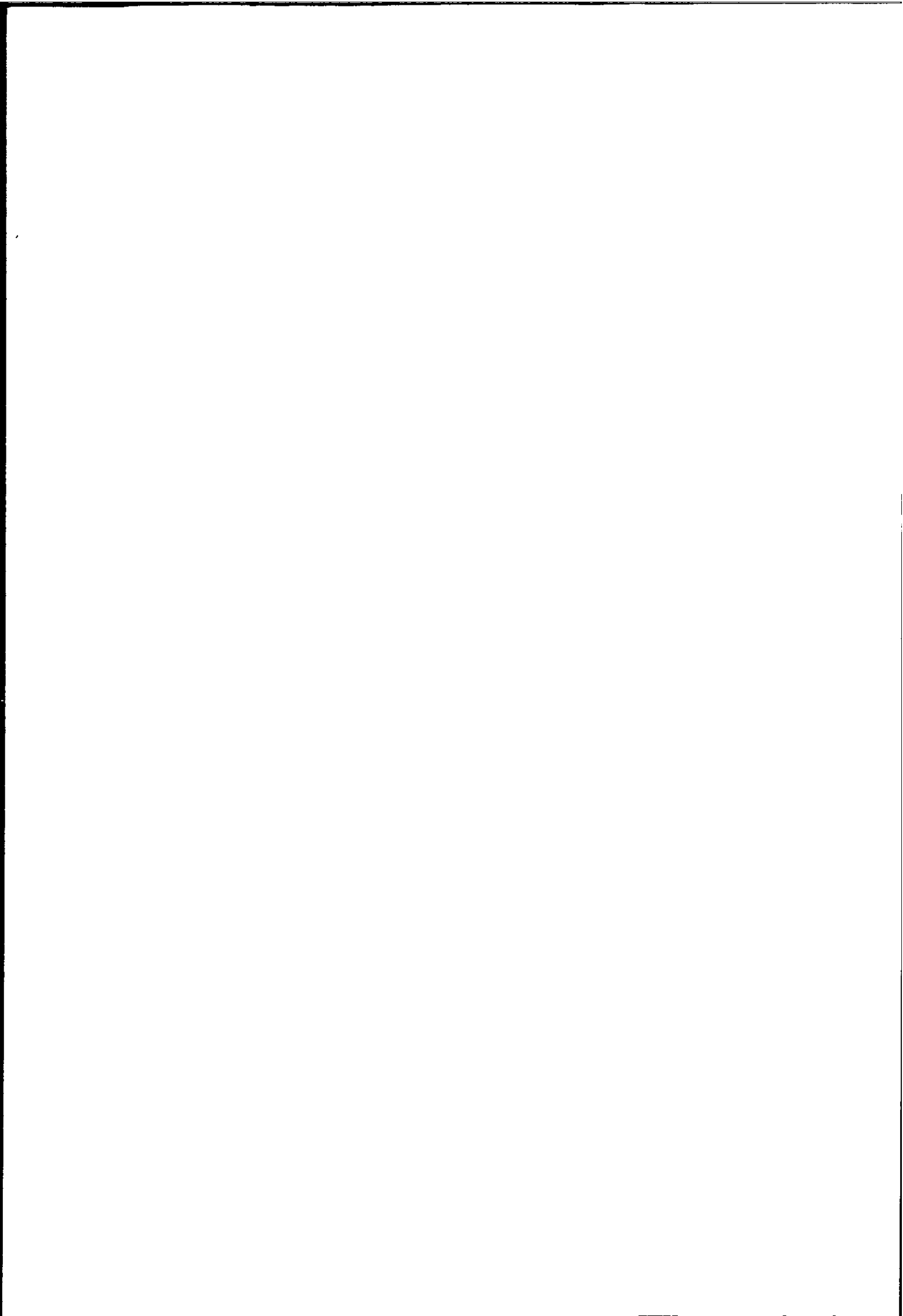
other and this prompted an investigation into how social constructions of gender can provide insight into how some individuals with dyslexia re-form their identity with this condition.

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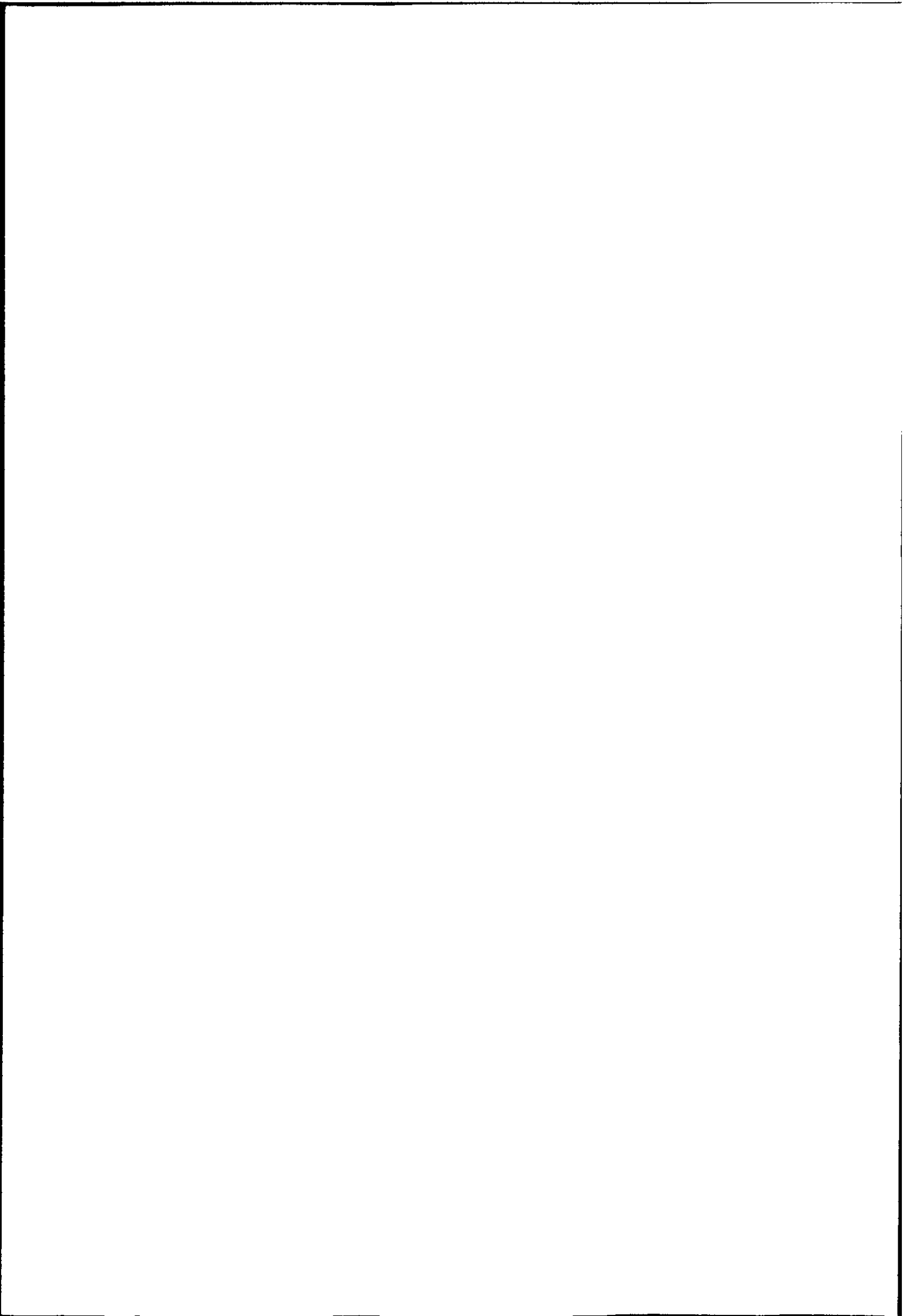
INTRODUCTION

Being dyslexic may be a bit like living in a foreign country where one can cope with the problems but everything requires more effort, more thought than at home. When driving in France, I can drive pretty fluently, but it takes effort – remember to drive on the right, give way to all comers, work out the route beforehand, get a passenger to read the traffic signs, and so on. It's more effortful, stressful and tiring (Fawcett 2001:17).

This thesis argues that although there is a wealth of research around the causes of dyslexia from a medical perspective (Fawcett and Nicholson 2005; Berninger 2004) and its remediation through medical and educational instruction (Snowling 2000: Reid et al 2000 and Fawcett 2001), there has been little research encapsulating how individuals integrate an understanding of themselves and their ability with this condition. Therefore, this study will undertake a sociological approach in exploring how individuals with dyslexia shape and inform their identity. This will consist of exploring media representations of dyslexia and personal narratives of people with dyslexia.

The importance of such research is evident through the increasing social expectation for individuals to achieve certain normative goals within their lives. Success in Western society is regarded as the acquisition of social status, a high level of income and compliance with prescribed roles. Cannon (1999) identified that an inability or failure to reach specific goals has a detrimental effect on an individual's sense of self-worth, self-esteem and self-confidence.

Humphrey (2002) has also argued that the inability to reach certain levels of educational achievement can often impact on self-confidence and self-worth. Cannon (1999 75) states,

> *Common setbacks experienced by students such as failing to get a good grade on an essay, can sometimes call our whole self-worth into question*

Miles (1999) and Miles and Varma (1995) have also found that lack of self-worth and self-esteem not only influences a range of social markers from career prospects to social status and relationships but can also, in more extreme cases, lead to learned helplessness or depression which have been associated with antisocial behaviour.

Barnes and Mercer (2001) also claim that in many Western societies individuals often strive not only to achieve but to appear as the visible fulfilment of perceived 'normal' expectations. Barnes, Oliver and Barton (2002) also argue that being perceived by others to be outside these parameters either in appearance or ability can have a detrimental effect on individual lives Swain et al (1999) have stated that being considered outside 'the norm' can detrimentally influence career progress, life choices and social standing and/or relationships. As Camilleri (1999 846) states

> *Being labelled 'handicapped', 'impaired', 'less fortunate' in our society has, at different parts of my life, led to feelings of shame, sinfulness, diminishment, dehumanisation; that I was an abhorrent 'freak' of nature, a burden on people who love me.*

I contend that dyslexia is viewed by many in society as a condition which impedes individual achievement in 'normal' educational goals, in particular reading and writing[1] Consequently, people with dyslexia are often perceived as

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[1] Please see World Health Organisation on definition of dyslexia.

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being outside 'normal' parameters of ability in this area. It is, therefore, important to explore how some individuals who are labelled or self-diagnosed as dyslexic 'identify' with these issues. Given the importance attached to education in the achievement of specific career choices and its subsequent influence on the wealth and status of the individual, the effect of underachieving can be detrimental to the individual's notion of self-worth, both in the learning environment and the world of work.

With this in mind, the idea of dyslexia as an impediment has to be addressed. The fact that prevalent views on dyslexia highlight the difficulties that many people with dyslexia experience with reading and writing skills makes it prudent to explore how individuals with dyslexia adjust their experience to their abilities to such an extent that they not only apply but get accepted into higher educational establishments. This is reinforced by Pollak's (2005) study on dyslexia and identity. However, I contend that such research, whilst both informative and relevant, differs from my own focus in a number of respects. Thus, I consider a brief synopsis of Pollak's (2005) work helpful in establishing the originality of this study.

Pollak (2005) explores only the experiences of students who are officially defined as dyslexic. In my study I have sought to discuss the thoughts and reflections of students who have described themselves as dyslexic; whether they have been officially labelled or have self-diagnosed with no official stamp of approval. I argue that research into dyslexia should investigate all students who consider themselves to have the condition in order to hear the experience of dyslexia from as many sources as possible as simply presenting or

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acknowledging those with official definitions does not allow a voice for all students who acknowledge themselves as dyslexic

Furthermore, Pollak's (2005) position is that terms such as dyslexia and disability should be considered as social constructs This thesis takes the view that perceptions of dyslexia and disability by some individuals may not conform to social, official or public definitions, references and concepts of the meaning of such terms. Consequently, it explores not only how individuals make sense of themselves, both within and outside social expectations of these categories, but also public perceptions of dyslexia as social expression. Pollak does indeed explore how individuals identify with specific models of learning when presenting themselves as dyslexic. However, this thesis goes one step further in that it explores how they refine their understanding of themselves with this condition, including how some individuals inform and re-form social constructions of dyslexia and define their understanding of this label when it is applied to themselves and their abilities Furthermore, in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of public awareness of dyslexia as a label and a term related to individual ability, this thesis also explores public perceptions of the meaning and representation of dyslexia in the pubic medium of the media. In this instance, media as a form of 'infotainment'[2] is used as a barometer to gain some perspective on public awareness and understanding of both the condition and people labelled as such.

However, I contend that a meaningful exploration of both a social and individual awareness of dyslexia cannot be successful without first discussing my

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[2] See Peelo (2005) for discussion on 'infotainment' in the media

influence on this representation of the term dyslexia and on notions of identity. In this instance, I contend that my personal beliefs and experiences affect the chosen frameworks and approaches of this research design. Thus, whilst this thesis explores the societal and cultural discourses around dyslexia which influence the 'reality' of having dyslexia, I acknowledge from the outset my own identity as a person with dyslexia. Therefore, my personal experiences and observations affect how I relate to the various concepts of ability, inability and disability employed in this thesis.

I argue that societal norms and values serve to construct specific identifying configurations associated with dyslexia, which then influence the public's expectations of people with dyslexia. To explore how society develops these configurations and how individuals inform their sense of self in conjunction with them necessitates an analysis of social representations of dyslexia.

Perhaps the most prevalent understanding of dyslexia has been formed through its representation as a medical condition (Snowling 2000), its identification as an educational difficulty (Educational Act 1995) and finally its official definition as a disability (World Health Organisation 2005). I argue that labelling such as this influences society's interpretation of the condition, and, consequently, fosters expectations of it as a condition labelled as disabled. Moreover, I contend that these descriptions and social evaluations inform and enforce certain expectations of the abilities and differences associated with people with such labels. This affects both social perceptions of the people labelled as such and also how people described as dyslexic identify with their condition.

Therefore, this thesis will explore both public representations and individual evaluations of dyslexia and the complex processes that inform them.

I contend that the way in which dyslexia is constructed as an educational impediment and described as a 'disability' poses a variety of important considerations, including how this term is processed within social norms and values. How do individuals described as dyslexic incorporate these ideas into an understanding of themselves? What are the perceptions associated with the label 'disabled'[3] and how do they shape and inform an individual's understanding of him/herself? Do people with dyslexia present and understand their identity differently depending on whether they are negotiating it from a personal or public viewpoint?

Exploring these questions with reference to personal (narrative) and public (media) accounts will help to evaluate some of the issues and problems associated with the label Because of constraints on time and finance, it would be impossible to explore all the influences that affect people with dyslexia and their perceptions of themselves. Consequently, because some organizations (official, legal and media) including The World Heath Organisation (WHO), and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) have presented 'dyslexia' as a problem which prevents individuals from attaining certain skills in literacy, I consider it important to explore how individuals in higher education evaluate their abilities in view of social presumptions This is significant because understanding why some individuals are determined to attend courses in higher education, even though this might mean them finding academic achievement

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[3] Please refer to Oliver's (1996) politics of disablement

problematic and running the risk of their peers 'finding out' their difficulties, could further society's understanding of the abilities of people with this condition.

Thus, this thesis has two key dimensions. First, a discourse analysis of public representations of dyslexic issues is conducted via a study of newspaper articles. Second, an analysis of private narratives concerning the thoughts and opinions of individuals who describe themselves as dyslexic provides the personal (as opposed to public) dimension. These analyses will then be discussed in view of the social construction of dyslexic terms in order to develop an understanding of the social, political and individual processes that impact on some people diagnosed as dyslexic. It is envisaged that exploring what some individuals describe as the 'dyslexic relation' to their experience and life chances will illustrate how living with this condition has influenced self-perception.

Society is prone to judgements formed around its expectations of the 'normal' and this can influence an individual's perception of him/herself. A person's identity is experienced through interaction with 'others'...'*the individual experiences himself as such, not directly but only indirectly*'(Mead 1934:138) ... '*We are more or less seeing ourselves as others see us*' (Mead 1934:68) [4]. This is most apparent when social expectation differs from a personal assessment of ability and self-perception.

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[4] As Watson (2003:35) states 'social interaction is what makes the social world go round'

Therefore, the analytical process is concerned with exploring, through discursive and theoretical devices, the tensions which surround (with a view to understanding dyslexia as a disability and identity as constructed in the public domain). Initially, I intended to focus solely on the experiences and opinions of individuals with this condition. However, in light of the differing and often contentious public and social awareness of dyslexia and examples stemming from Dr Elliot's (2005) questioning of dyslexia as a genuine condition, who claims,

It was largely an 'emotional construct' .. After 30 years in the field, he said, he had little confidence in his ability to diagnose dyslexia. BBC news [5],

I became increasingly interested in media representations of dyslexic issues. I argue that media representation of the issues and constructs surrounding this topic can and often do reinforce social expectations, perceptions and recognition of dyslexia and, thus, the individuals associated with them This thesis, then, aims to explore how newspaper articles present dyslexia to its readers in order to explore some of the issues which may impact on the identity of individuals with this condition.

I argue that understanding how individuals have developed constructs and descriptions of themselves with this condition is not only relevant to this study but, enables us a privileged insight into the forming of an identity which not only enables them to attend educational establishments but also presents a beneficial self-awareness of their ability with this condition.

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[5] BBC news http //news bbc.co uk/1/hi/education/4205932 stm accessed on April 13 2009

Overview of chapters

Chapter 1 evaluates how tensions surrounding the term dyslexia accumulated during references to it as a medical, educational and disabling condition. I explore how the 'controversy' surrounding this condition has influenced individual self-concept and confidence through such issues as educational experiences and work environments.

Chapter 2 explores some of the major theoretical issues and concepts arising in relation to identity. The implications of having the condition 'dyslexia are discussed through discourses of identity with references to labelling which categorizes 'different' and 'normality', and how these terms are informed through the language and text in which they are presented. This discussion also explores social perceptions of 'labelling' through Foucault's work on power structures and knowledge and its implications for social expectations, employability and media portrayals of dyslexia as a disabled condition. The construct of dyslexia in Higher Education will also be discussed to gain a fuller understanding of the social inferences within which individuals with dyslexia may be integrated.

Chapter 3 explains the relevance of using discourse analysis to explore theoretical assumptions and the methodological approaches used to collect and analyse the data for this thesis. A theoretical framework focusing on language, text, reflectivity and accountability is employed in order to explore the meaning and representation contained within newspaper articles which refer to dyslexia and in-depth qualitative interviews with individuals attending Higher Education.

Chapter 4 discusses the findings of newspaper representations of dyslexia and explores the ways in which dyslexia has been described. This entails a discourse analysis of the language, text, and inferences which are associated with dyslexic issues and people described as dyslexic.

Chapter 5 discusses the narratives and experiences of people self defined as dyslexic. It explores the participants' opinions and experiences concerning their identification with dyslexia, within their childhood to the present day and their understanding of their experiences. It also explores how they perceive themselves and their abilities with this condition

Chapter 6 discusses the implications of the findings from chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5 Relevant arguments of social awareness of dyslexia and in particular discourses of dyslexia and how social expectations have been reformed within a personal understanding of dyslexia are considered

The chapter concludes with a discussion on the ways in which individuals with dyslexia draw on differing discourses in order to refine their own understanding of themselves with dyslexia

Chapter seven concludes the thesis and contains recommendations for further research in this area.

CHAPTER 1 – THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND EDUCATIONAL EXPECTATIONS ON THE 'IDEA' OF DYSLEXIA

This thesis argues that before discussing social and individual perceptions of the term 'dyslexia' as a condition, an exploration of the meaning of the term as described, defined and presented in society is necessary. Thus, this chapter investigates 'dyslexia' through a critical analysis of the social construction of the label. That is to say, through the concept of dyslexia as subject to social structures which have shaped, transformed and defined the term within wider cultural and social understandings. I contend that these understandings are influenced by social perceptions of its origins and its accreditation within specific social structures; in this instance within the wider social perception of conditions officially labelled 'disability' and 'educational difficulty'.

Consequently, this chapter explores how the term 'dyslexia' is fashioned from various channels, including cultural and social values, which are created, sustained and/or transformed by action within various social institutions. It also discusses how certain institutions, including health (scientific knowledge), government (policy), education (knowledge and practice), and media ('ideas' and 'news') can have an influence in many ways on the 'idea' of dyslexia. The analytical purpose of this chapter is to expose how different social, educational and medical-based 'ideas' and institutions have influenced notions of dyslexia both as a social indicator and as an individual identifying term. This will be achieved through an exploration of the origins of the condition to consider how dyslexia has been and still is influenced by its initial categorization as a medical

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phenomenon Additionally, this chapter will analyse how dyslexia has also been linked to an educational difficulty and how such labelling has been disseminated through political agendas, polices and Acts And finally, it will discuss the influence of these two institutions on the conception of dyslexia as a disability in the present day.

The problems which surround the description of Dyslexia as a reading and writing difficulty

One of the initial problems which surround the description of dyslexia is the label *'medical anomaly'*. Dyslexia was initially presented as an identifying feature in the late 1800s The word dyslexia in medical journals referred to patients who presented with reading and writing difficulties, even though they were depicted as having average or above average intellectual abilities (please refer to Ott 1997:6). This medical anomaly was given the name 'dyslexia' which stems from the Greek words *'dys'* meaning difficulty or malfunction and *'lexis'* meaning language[1]. Thus, the word dyslexia means a difficulty with language (Ott 1997:1)[2]. However, in the 1880s Adokph Kussmaul coined the phrase 'word blindness' to describe the term 'dyslexia' This reference quickly caught on and is still used to refer to dyslexia today (Anderson, P. L., Meier-Hedde, R. 2001)

However, Miles (2006) argues that such descriptions have only added to the misconceptions relating to the 'symptoms' of dyslexia. Thus, the initial

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[1]This type of dyslexia was termed 'developmental dyslexia'
[2] One of the first reports containing a reference to the condition 'dyslexia' was published in a medical journal in 1887 by Rudolf Berlin who described the phenomenon of patients who, after having 'brain seizures', were left with problems in their reading and writing abilities (Guardiola 2001 6)

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construction of dyslexia as a medical condition described as 'word blindness' is problematic and the continual use of word blindness to refer to dyslexia has arguably been the initial catalyst for some of the present day tensions which surround the term. Thus, it is useful at this time to explore the ways in which such references have influenced social perception of the 'meaning' of the word dyslexia. Miles (2006) argues that such a dogmatic term increases the difficulty of establishing that people with dyslexia are individuals with individual strengths and weaknesses: the word dyslexia can only hint at the variables associated with their abilities and/or difficulties. Therefore, dyslexia is not a singular term with which to describe a difficulty with reading; yet this reference to dyslexia as a reading difficulty still exists.

Elliott's (2005a) belief that dyslexia is solely or predominantly a reading difficulty, has led him to argue against dyslexia's classification as a disabling condition. He asserts that because dyslexia is no more than a difficulty in reading, it does not warrant specialist support or official accreditation as a disabling condition deserving of specific recognition and support. Elliott (2005a) questions why people with this condition should be highlighted at all. He claims that if dyslexia is predominantly a reading/writing difficulty, it is no different from the difficulties encountered by people who have 'poor' (that is below those reading levels equated as 'normal' for any one reading age) reading abilities yet are not described as dyslexic. Thus, people with dyslexia need no other support than given to those described as 'poor' readers. In this circumstance 'dyslexia' has no jurisdiction as a specific term or impairment. Elliott claims that because both groups are described as having similar difficulties in reading and writing, either no one should be diagnosed as dyslexic or all 'poor' readers

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should be labelled with this term (Elliott 2005a). Graham Stringer, a Labour MP for Manchester Blackley, agrees with such arguments. He states.

> Dyslexia is a cruel fiction, it is no more real than the 19th-century scientific construction of 'the aether' to explain how light travels through a vacuum. (in Burgess 2009).

According to Miles (2006), comments such as these appear credible because they both mistakenly consider dyslexia to be simply a reading difficulty.

However, such arguments have been widely dismissed Fawcett (2000) argues that although there is much dispute around the characteristics of dyslexia, Elliott's arguments do not take into account the specific tests and continued evidence which reinforce the credibility of this condition and the wide characteristics associated with dyslexia (Fawcett 2000). The most prevalent test to assess the likelihood of a person having dyslexia was devised by Miles in the 1960s and is still referred to today When this is added to the increasing scientific knowledge accumulating in the study of dyslexia, then the idea that dyslexia is simply a difficulty with reading becomes unsustainable. In light of the evidence, dyslexia is a palpable and complicated condition (Snowling 2000; Fawcett 2000, Miles 2006)

Miles reinforces such comments stating that Dyslexia should be viewed as much more than simply a reading problem. It is a syndrome 'which is easily recognised once one knows what to look for' (Miles 2006·108). There are three distinct areas which define dyslexic traits. These are: 'genetic evidence' in that this condition often runs in families, 'anatomical evidence' which states that people with dyslexia show differing organisational distinctions such as problems with short-term memory, map reading or identifying their right and left side (Ott

1997); finally, 'phonological difficulties' often found in ordering, identifying and remembering speech sounds (Miles 2006:108). These may appear in such areas as spelling, reading and writing but not necessarily. Regarding dyslexia as a syndrome (that is a set of symptoms) rather than simply a learning difficulty in reading provides society with a richer understanding of dyslexia.

However, Elliott (2005a) counteracts these arguments stating that many children referred to as 'poor readers' also present with features apparent in people with dyslexia, such as 'poor' organisational skills. Elliott argues that such a feature is not due to any condition but is present because any difficulties poor readers experience with literacy skills will have a 'knock on effect' which impacts on other abilities. Thus, according to Elliott, people described as dyslexic experience difficulties in organisational skills or with short-term memory as a result of their difficulties in reading and writing. Therefore, other characteristics other than 'poor' reading ability are a product of their experience, not a feature of their difficulty. According to Elliott (2005a), this is why many people labelled as dyslexic present with such differences.

However, the doubts inherent in this train of thought are summed up in Kate Griggs's (2009) angry reply to the comments of Labour MP Gary Stringer. She is Founder of   the 'Xtraordinary People' charity for people with dyslexia and says,

> *It amazes me that people can make comments like that when there is so much evidence about dyslexia. It causes great upset and distress. I think comments like this are so unhelpful for the millions of dyslexic children and their parents who are struggling in schools. ...There is so much scientific evidence both from MRI brain imaging and scanning and genetic evidence across the board that quite conclusively says dyslexia does exist. It's a different wiring of the brain in children who are dyslexic.*

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They need to be identified and supported (quoted in Burgess Times online 14 Jan 2009).

I contend that the controversy surrounding the presentation of dyslexia is in part due to its designation within specific definitions and categories. I propose to analyse how the general social expectation of dyslexia as predominantly a reading and writing difficulty is due to its classification as a disability and an educational difficulty. Thus, even though evidence has continued to validate the differences in ability of people with dyslexia, the doubt surrounding dyslexia as a condition still remains.

One issue which is problematic in understanding the variations inherent within dyslexia is its official definition. This has been reinforced to a certain extent by the difficulty of establishing a specific definitive definition As Tresman (2006) states, any 10 publications of the description of the term 'dyslexia' will give ten differing definitions. Barnes (1999) states that a condition is recognised as a medical phenomenon when its various features are portrayed as being at odds with those considered crucial to fulfilling the requirements of the 'norm'. Organisations often evaluate a specific condition's credibility with an assessment of its ability or not to fulfil these requirements. Consequently, comparisons between individual ability and the norm soon become the focus for consideration.

However, these considerations are often misrepresentations of an individual's true ability or of their difference to the 'norm'. For instance, a person accredited as 'blind' does not necessarily need to have no sight at all but will often have a degree of difficulty in vision (Hunt 1966) Similarly, as we have described, not

only has dyslexia been misrepresented as solely a reading difficulty, but because of the oversimplified descriptions and definitions of the condition and those abilities considered normal exhibited by some individuals with dyslexia, many people described as dyslexic may appear not to have the condition at all.

I contend that this oversimplification has misinformed society of the complexity of dyslexia as a medical and educational phenomenon. I will demonstrate how certain specific policies and legal Acts further reinforce this simplification of dyslexia. I further state that when these policies are presented within certain frames of reference, in this case discourses of disability and discourses of education, this misinformation is not only detrimental to society's evaluation of the ability of individuals with this condition but also presents individuals who describe themselves as dyslexic with conflicting perceptions of their credibility to be classified as disabled. To put it another way, dyslexia, because of its accreditation within certain institutional labels, is often associated by society with certain abilities or rather dis-abilities. Thus, those people who are termed 'dyslexic' yet do not appear within these disabling functions may be viewed with suspicion and doubt. As those with dyslexia are also part of the social fabric, this accreditation can also confuse how individuals with this condition understand themselves as disabled. To understand how these frames of reference have influenced how dyslexia is portrayed necessitates an exploration of how specific labels and definitions can influence social expectations of the 'meaning' of dyslexia.

References of dyslexia within specific organisations and their influence on social expectations of the condition

Because the World Health Organisation (WHO) and its Classification of Diseases is acknowledged as a credible and enlightened assembly, its descriptions of those characteristics deemed to be dyslexic are regarded as vital to understanding the social conception of dyslexia (Snowling 2000). It is interesting to see that despite evidence which proclaims that a definitive classification is problematic, this has not prevented certain organisations presenting specific descriptions of dyslexia. WHO is considered an important organisation and its definitions and descriptions of medical conditions are often referred to by many organisations, not least the European Union, the United Nations and the British Government when discussing medical conditions within certain policies and reports[3].

The World Health Organisation's (WHO) descriptions of the features and characteristics of dyslexia impact on the policies and agendas which influence government support for education (Snowling 2000). The WHO state that dyslexia is a 'Specific reading disorder', (ICD - F81.0 2007) which is synonymous with other disorders including *'backward reading, developmental dyslexia, specific reading retardation and spelling difficulties'*. It then describes conditions within this disorder.

> *The main feature of this disorder is a specific and significant impairment in the development of reading skills, which is not solely accounted for by mental age, visual acuity problems, or inadequate schooling. Reading comprehension skill, reading word recognition, oral reading skill, and performance of tasks requiring reading may all be affected*

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[3]Even with the research and concerns of 'experts' on the differing symptoms of the condition, many organisations, including the United Nations and The European Union, still acknowledge and refer to the World Health Organisation's definition of dyslexia

(WHO 2007)

This reference of dyslexia reinforces Elliott's (2005a) arguments that this condition is solely or predominantly to do with reading abilities. Snowling (2000) argues that this definition is misleading as it ignores the differing and varied traits associated with dyslexia. Snowling, a professor in psychology and a leading expert in the field of developmental reading disorders, states that presenting dyslexia as solely a difficulty with words and predominantly a reading difficulty is problematic in a number of respects. She states that this rigid description is misleading given that many 'clinicians' are 'hard-pressed in the absence of objective criteria to decide whether or not to 'diagnose' a person as dyslexic.' Such a static definition then is questionable (Snowling 2000:15).

Furthermore, the reference to dyslexia as predominantly a difficulty in the development of reading skills not only ignores other non-educational aspects of the dyslexic condition such as poor short-term memory or poor organisational skills, but also equates the difficulty in literacy skills to a visual perception predicament. Snowling (2000) states that this conclusion may be confusing as most children will go through a stage of mirroring the images of letters and these findings should be viewed in combination with all the other findings and not as an isolated statement of fact for children deemed to be dyslexic. Snowling (2000:35) states that although an obvious symptom of dyslexia occurs within the reading and writing area, it is not a consequence of visual difficulties. She claims that :

> It has become widely accepted that in cognitive terms, dyslexia is a consequence of a phonological deficit. A more specific hypothesis that we will consider is that the deficit in dyslexia is in the way in which the brain codes or 'represents' the spoken attributes of words. In short, dyslexic readers have poorly specified phonological representations.

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Furthermore, the WHO's definition refers only to what a person with dyslexia should not be able to do and does not include some of the positive aspects that have been associated with dyslexia, such as good creative skills (Snowling 2000)

Also, Miles (2006) claims that ignorance about dyslexic issues has resulted in the failure to meet the needs of children with dyslexia in the educational establishments of the 1960s and 70s and this has resulted in the hurtful accusation that children described as dyslexic were 'not trying' (Miles 2006:61). It was hoped that such experiences would disappear once dyslexia became more widely known and understood. However, more recent studies from Riddick (2000, 2001) reveal that this lack of understanding of people identified as dyslexic still prevails and attracts remarks such as 'lazy' or 'stupid' when they are unable to learn at a similar pace to their peers (Riddick 2001)[4].

The first issue is that referring to the features of 'dyslexia' within a medical frame of reference presupposes that it is a medical anomie requiring medical 'attention'. The relevance of these expectations is discussed in more detail later in the chapter. However, it is sufficient to say that conditions presented within notions of medical 'difference' are often associated with 'inability' and 'illness' and as such are in need of social intervention requiring 'cure' or 'control' (Turner 2001 in Albrecht).

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[4] Consequently, it is argued that a static and narrow definition from such a prominent body as the WHO can only reinforce the doubts that many people may incorporate when viewing a person who is dyslexic who has exceeded those limited standards This continual highlighting of poor reading skills, then, may have a detrimental effect on the social acceptance of people with dyslexia and the dyslexic label, especially if they are perceived as having a competent level of reading and writing.

I assert that the classification of dyslexia within the premise of a reading/writing difficultly further enforces the arguments which question the legitimacy of dyslexia as a genuine condition. The continuing doubt surrounding the condition not only impacts on social awareness of dyslexia but also on the individual described as dyslexic. In an attempt to encourage society to recognise dyslexia as a legitimate condition and to raise awareness of the differing characteristics of dyslexia, Miles founded The British Dyslexic Association (BDA) in 1972 (Tresman 2006). He felt a more complex understanding of the condition would encourage 'others' to perceive it as a lifelong condition affecting a number of different areas of a person's life and would also alleviate the doubt surrounding the authenticity of the term. As Riddick states, the large body of research into dyslexic issues and their causation has *'been important in validating the construct of dyslexia and providing evidence in the face of disbelief and hostility'* (Riddick 2001:230).

However, in spite of such advances, the difficulty in understanding dyslexia as other than predominantly a reading difficulty continues. One reason for this could be the British policies which have classified dyslexia as a disabling condition and an educational difficulty. However, in order to present dyslexia in such a way requires a compliance with the definitions presented by The WHO. I contend that this has resulted in dyslexia being regarded as a static specific condition and predominantly a reading difficulty, which when presented within discourses of disabling conditions leads to an incompatibility between the two agendas. However, in order to discuss how social awareness of dyslexia and its features have been formulated first requires an exploration into the policies and legal definitions with which dyslexia has been associated before discussing how

discourses of disability are informed As Wendell states, definitions are important as they *'influence social policies, and determine outcomes that profoundly affect the lives of people with impairments/conditions'* (Wendell 1996:11). Therefore, an understanding of how these reports and polices have presented dyslexia is relevant at this junction.

The presentation of dyslexia within British policies has caused sociocultural expectations concerning the abilities of people with this condition to become confused I suggest that this confusion and doubt is due, in part, to the official inclusion of dyslexia as a disability and an educational difficulty, presentations which are represented within discursive practices of disability and educational performance and can often influence social understanding of the ability of those described as dyslexic. In this context, dyslexia is seen not as a condition but as the result of discursive practices in sociocultural institutions. To discuss how certain descriptions have influenced the social conception of dyslexia, I intend initially to review what I mean by discourses to give a more clearer understanding of how discourses and discursive practices can influence both the policies in which dyslexia has been represented and also how discourses of disability and education have subjugated the social meaning of dyslexia, thus sustaining the confusion surrounding the ability or difference of individuals who are described as 'dyslexic'.

Discourse theories and the treatment of dyslexia as an identifying term

Discourses, then, refer to systems of social meaning that influence the identities and behaviours of individual agents. (Abberley 2002), Discourses are not

intrinsically 'true' or 'false', since each individual can derive a number of different elements from different discourses. Nor are they closed systems (Abberley 2002). Therefore, they can draw on other discourses and evolve over time to present differing discourses (Fairclough 1992). Furthermore, all areas of life, whether social, political, economic or otherwise, have a discursive character; all social activities involve a discursive facet (Cocker and French 1999). Thus, discourses are not detached from actions, since actions themselves embody social significance and beliefs.

Discourse theories are concerned with the role of meaningful social practices and ideas in social and political life. They aim to explore the effects of different systems of meaning – or discourses and how they shape the individual's understanding of their social roles. Thus, exploring discourses which surround individuals with dyslexia combines dyslexia as a classification, a legal representation and a label used to describe people with the condition into a coherent yet flexible conceptual framework through which the different strands of the research can be drawn together in the final overall analysis.

Thus, an analysis in terms of discourse allows for an understanding of the relationship between dyslexia and the experience of individuals who are identified within this category. This will allow for a more multidimensional analysis of this term in relation to individual experience and sociocultural values. Foucault's work envisages discourse as actively constructing society on numerous dimensions (Fairclough 1992:39). Here, the term dyslexia is shaped and moulded within discourses of disability, health terminology, medical and educational institutions and interactions with various individuals within these

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social structures including, doctors, teachers, parents and peers and so on
These also include previously discussed representations within discourses of
'normality'

Thus, the understanding of dyslexia and identity is continually reproduced within
power structures supported by a discursive system of ideas and practices Also,
power structures are not exclusive to official organisations such as official
health or educational bodies, they are also comprehended on local and public
levels of knowledge.   James and Hockey (2007) argue that these power
structures can be recognised in relation to health topic issues and areas They
state.

> *The concept of discourse becomes a useful shorthand for thinking about
> the ongoing production of health knowledge as a systematic set of
> representations, whether this is through the images that appear on
> television screens, adverts in magazines, newspaper articles, healer's
> divinations or the 'old wives tales' that are related across generations as
> sources of advice and understanding. (James and Hockey 2007:87)*

In this instance, discourses of dyslexia can be presented within informal and
formal representations of understanding. These representations further depend
on the differing levels of power in operation at any one time The usefulness of
this conception of discourse is, therefore, important when exploring the different
experiences of individuals who live with dyslexia as it allows the research to
gain some degree of understanding of how and in what respects individuals
identify or dismiss discourses which surround their understanding of themselves
with this condition.

Fairclough (1992) through his explanation of discourses of specific
organisations also refers to how differing discourses can both influence and

inform how individuals conjectured within certain labels, such as dyslexia and disability, identify with the social accreditation of these terms. As Fairclough (1992:31) states:

> Social subjects are constituted in relation to particular DF (discursive formations) and their meaning; these DFs are, according to Pecheux, linguistic facets of "domains of thought"...socio-historically constituted in the form of stabilization...DFs are positioned within complexes of related DFs referred to as 'interdiscourse' and the specific meanings of one DF are determined 'from outside' by its relationship to others within interdiscourses.

Thus, society assumes subjects, such as dyslexia which is officially legitimised as disabling,[5] to be associated with general notions or characteristics of disability. According to Fairclough, then, to maintain stability between dyslexia and disability, the features accredited as dyslexic must also be related to the general definition of 'disability'. Instability occurs when features attached to a condition are not accredited as belonging to the general discourses of disability. Put another way, if dyslexia, although recognised as a biological difference, is not attributed with 'disabling' characteristics, people may doubt its credibility to be described as a 'disability'. This highlights how the continuation of the arguments surrounding the validity of dyslexia as both a medical phenomena and a disabling condition is reinforced.

One reason for the problematic reference to the definition of dyslexia could be due to the inconsistencies between dyslexia as a disabling condition and the official definition of 'disability'. The discursive formations of dyslexia must be credible for it to be recognised socially as a disabling condition. Inconsistencies between the social concept of dyslexia and notions of disability make the

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[5] Disability Discrimination Act 1995 accredits dyslexia as a disability

relationship seem doubtful and thus encourage some individuals to doubt the association

To understand these discrepancies in greater detail and to explore how values and expectations within these discrepancies impact on the individual's identity with dyslexia requires an awareness of the meanings and power issues which impact on the formations of language around which representations of 'dyslexia', 'disability' and 'identity' are considered

The formations of the identity of a person with dyslexia, in this instance, refer to discourses of dyslexia and not dyslexic 'ideologies'. Ideologies can contain fixed ideas, whereas discourses are never completely closed to outside influences or alternative explanation: discourses are never completely fixed, they are embodied within a compilation of social factors and predominant ideas. Ideologies exemplify a persuasive argument within discourse systems, which endeavour to make exclusive one discourse over another. Therefore, discourses incorporate not just ideas but wider social and cultural factors. Hafferty and Foster (1994:186) assert that

> *Social recognition and reaction to disabilities* is *'influenced by a myriad of broader social factors, including values associated with bodily integrity, social competence, and independence'.*

Therefore, prominent social values relating to disabling conditions are signified and then naturalised in culture through social sanctions. The application of these sanctions refers to a variety of representations of a disabling condition which is impacted by the values which social expectations accredit to a condition deemed to be disabling Thus, social acceptance of dyslexia as a

disabling condition requires dyslexia to conform to social expectations of both the understanding of a disabling condition and the integrity of the features of dyslexia to warrant such description. The effect of combining the social expectations of discourses of disability is often perceived as inconsistent with the social understanding of dyslexia. To understand more fully how dominant discourses of dyslexia have been projected within social structures one must acknowledge the influence of policies and legal Acts which have not only often presented dyslexia within certain criteria but have also presented definitions and descriptions of dyslexia.

How policies and legal Acts describe dyslexia

One of the first Acts which discussed dyslexia is 'The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act (1970)'(DHSS 1970). The reference to dyslexia within its 'miscellaneous provisions' states that support is needed because special educational treatment for children suffering from 'acute' dyslexia equates dyslexia with specific discourses of understanding. The terms 'treatment' and 'suffering from' and 'acute' highlight the medical agenda in which dyslexia is described. The title 'Chronically Sick and Disabled' reinforces the medical agenda by which the condition is described.

However, discourses that place dyslexia within the medical condition and not as an educational difficulty are questioned to a certain extent in two reports of the 1970s. This shift in describing dyslexia as a medical anomie towards its portrayal as an educational difficulty had been initially discussed within the

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Bullock (1975) and Warnock (1978) reports The Warnock report has arguably had an influence on how dyslexia has been addressed in subsequent policies and legal agendas The Bullock Report (1975) referred to dyslexic-type issues which it stated needed support in the educational system It said a child who has a *'spelling disability is undoubtedly handicapped in society'* or *'children with a reading disability need to be supported in the education system'* (The Bullock Report 1975:181). Although both reports do not mention the term 'dyslexia', the descriptions in the Bullock report of difficulties with literacy skills do acknowledge that children with these difficulties need supporting It is evident from the terminology used to describe a child's 'handicap' in reading and spelling as a 'disability' that this report associates dyslexia with a medical impediment

This seems surprising, however, when considering that the Warnock report inferred a more educational approach be taken to the difficulties it perceives warrant support. It also *'acknowledged the presence of children who had unexpected and unusual difficulties in literacy'* (Reid 2005a:2). Importantly, it discusses the need to remove 'difficulties in literacy' from the medical schedule and to address them within an educational agenda

Riddick (1996) argues that the Warnock report helped change the classification of labels for children requiring support Before the Warnock report, children were 'categorised according to a specific medical description such as *'severe educational subnormality'*, *'moderate educational subnormality'* or *'handicapped"* (Riddick 1996:22). The Warnock report stated that these medical categories did not give any information about the child's learning needs and

because these medical descriptions were attached to all conditions, children seen as having literacy difficulties alone would not be considered to have an educational need. The report argued that having a medical condition did not necessarily imply an educational need and vice versa. The Warnock report also claimed that the child's educational difficulties were not solely dependent on any 'condition' but also depended on the degree of support and understanding which the child received both from school and at home, stating, *'each child should be looked at individually to ascertain all the factors affecting their educational performance'* (Warnock report cited in Riddick 1996:23).

Riddick states that The Warnock report's re-evaluation of language clearly divides children with learning difficulties from those with a medical condition which impedes their standard of learning. Riddick (1996) argues that the way in which the Warnock report refers to children with learning difficulties validates the need to segregate those with dyslexic features from those who have 'poor' reading skills (sometimes referred to as 'common or garden readers'), that is children who have reading difficulties but do not have dyslexia (Riddick 1996) .

Further, the premise that all children should be evaluated individually and that both school and home environments should be taken into account when discussing the child's ability highlights the importance the report places on external factors in a child's ability to learn. As Riddick states *'in order to have a full and accurate picture of a child's learning difficulties we need to know how all the environmental factors which are in operation'* impede a child's learning (Riddick 1996:24). Riddick claims that even though the Warnock report did not refer to specific labels, it did acknowledge how social barriers rather than

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individual inability impede a child's learning. Consequently, the Warnock report highlighted that experiences in both school and home environments not only have an effect on a child's learning needs but also affect a child's perception of themselves, their self-concept

Nevertheless, there are some concerns about the Warnock report and its lack of reference specifically to 'dyslexia' Reid (2005a) argues that the policy did not ever mention the term dyslexia when referring to children with this condition Arguments arising over this omission insisted that not referring to dyslexia was not helpful in validating dyslexia as a 'genuine' condition. Riddick (1996) argued that the Warnock report's hesitancy in labelling a child with a condition was not because it judged dyslexia to be unimportant, but partly because of the climate at the time which reasoned that labelling could have a stigmatising affect on a person's identity. Conversely, Riddick argues that such an omission did add fuel to the argument that using the term 'dyslexia' within educational policies would effectuate a *distance from common or garden readers*' which was required (Riddick 1996 22) Riddick claims that the terms 'backward reader' and 'dyslexic', because of a lack of differentiation, reinforce the premise that they are one and the same and should, therefore, attract the same support However, Riddick argues this lack of acknowledgement actually aided the dyslexic 'cause' in that many people were so incensed about the doubt instilled through this lack of acceptance of the term in the Warnock report that they lobbied for the 'term to be accepted and applied' in future policies (Riddick 1996)

However, Riddick argues that the Warnock report did provide evidence of a necessity for labels through an acknowledgment that to prevent 'remedial' *children from being 'lumped together'* (ibid:24) there is a need for assessments which *'inform the type of support they require'* (Riddick 1996:24). Thus, Riddick claims that the report does not advocate that those with reading issues, but not labelled dyslexic, should receive any less support, simply that a child who has dyslexia has differing needs which require different teaching methods and skills[6]. Consequently, the Warnock report is able to differentiate between dyslexia as a medical condition and an educational need. Riddick argues that this should have postponed the argument which continues to expand around the difference or lack of it between children deemed dyslexic and those deemed 'poor' readers. However, even in the light of the accumulating evidence of the differences between children with 'poor' reading skills and those with dyslexia, (Riddick 1996: 22) these arguments still persist[7].

Importantly, the suggestion in the Warnock report that children with educational difficulties should not be presented as a medical issue has been largely ignored within subsequent British policies and official Acts (Pollak 2005). This is highlighted in the definitions of various medical and educational policies.

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[6] See Shaywitz and Shaywitz (2005) on the differences in development of dyslexia with reference to functionality of the brain

[7] See Graham Stringer (2009) on the myth that is dyslexia-
news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/7829108.stm - 53k

Acknowledgment by British Discrimination Acts (DDA) and Educational Acts of the 'needs' of people with dyslexia

The Warnock report suggested that educational difficulties should be seen as different and distinct from medical difficulties. However, Pollak (2005) states that future Acts have largely ignored this recommendation This is seen in the initial DDA (1995) which has continued to present a child's educational 'need' within a medical and educational agenda. These classifications are mainly derived from a medical agenda which has, once more, described as a medical condition the need of some children for support. The conclusion of these classifications is manifest in the latest Educational Act which changed its name from Special Educational Needs (SEN) to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2002). Combining an educational 'need' with a disability has effectively undone the Warnock report's argument for the prevention of lumping together a child's 'needs' and for society to be informed of *'the type of support they require'* (Riddick 1996:24) Thus, the latest Act refers to those conditions defined within the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) whose official definition of a disabling condition defines a disabled person as someone with·

> *A physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day to day activities' (DDA 1995).*

This definition has been incorporated with minor changes into the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001) and has mainly been adapted from the WHOs definition of a disabling condition, and describes children needing educational support. This is clearly identified within the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001), which claims that schools have a.

> duty to educate children with special educational needs in mainstream schooling unless statemented under section 324 and it's deemed not to be compatible for the child, [and it is]...unlawful for the body responsible for a school to discriminate against a disabled pupil in the education of that pupil. (Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001:11).

The act also states that it is the responsibility of the school to ensure that,

> in relation to education and associated services provided for, or offered to, pupils at the school by it, disabled pupils are not placed at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with pupils who are not disabled' (Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001:11).

Consequently, this links the educational 'need' of a child with a disabling condition. However, Reid et al (2001) state that incorporating dyslexia within the umbrella of 'disability' does offer some power over the support required for people with dyslexia. Thus, the inclusion of dyslexia into the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and within the Educational Act title can be seen in a positive light. Kirk et al (2001) claim that one area of benefit in describing dyslexia as a disabling educational condition is that it is presented within a legal 'instrument' which should support people with dyslexia by providing an 'equal playing field' in such areas as employment and education. They state that the Act should guarantee that the rights of all adults and children with dyslexia are protected and even though 'dyslexia may not be as readily obvious as, for example, a physical disability, it may have no less social, emotional and personal consequences for the individual' (Kirk et al 2001:293 in Fawcett 2001).

Fawcett (2001) also supports this inclusion into the disability remit stating that such references within these Acts acknowledge the 'needs' of children with dyslexia as different to those children deemed to be poor readers. She also

states that by highlighting dyslexic issues within the Acts 'exceptional progress has been made,' highlighting the 'needs' of children with dyslexia (Fawcett 2001:11) Thus, acknowledging the difficulties surrounding the learning of children with dyslexia within the Educational Acts implies that schools must provide support to allow children with dyslexia to participate in the educational environment on an equal footing with their non-dyslexic counterparts. Ott (1997) contends that the increased awareness of dyslexia in the educational environment has also been seen to enable more children to be recognised as having dyslexia Reid et al (2001) state that the recognition of a child as dyslexic is important as non-diagnosis may impede the development of strategies in schools which are of benefit in adulthood (Reid et al 2001.9).

Therefore, not only has the inclusion of dyslexia within the disability remit had a major impact on the political reference of the meaning of the term, it has also enabled the term to be more widely known and the policies should empower individuals to try to gain the relevant support for children in educational environments.

However, although the inclusion of dyslexia within the 'disability' remit can be perceived as a strength, such references and definitions also hinder enlightenment in social perceptions concerning dyslexia I contend that the key to these issues is exploring how society perceives those people described or defined as disabled Given the official definitions which often describe dyslexia as predominantly a difficulty with reading and spelling skills, and added to the fact that the social construction of a disabling condition is often perceived within the official definition of disability, which refers to

A physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day to day activities' (The DDA 1995),

I contend that these views and statements further confuse the social expectation of dyslexia within the classification of disability.

Therefore, to explore how having a condition presumed to be an educational difficultly and a disability can influence social expectations of dyslexia, I propose that a discussion on discourses of disability and education and the place of dyslexia within such dominate social structures is necessary. Because of the complexity of the discourses surrounding these terms, I have explored discourses of disability and discourses of education separately in order to provide clarity. Although I am aware that living with dyslexia is often presented to individuals with this condition and others within a combination of social, cultural and political frames of reference, I argue that due to the historic rise of the meaning of the term dyslexia and its inclusion within specific policies and Acts, the understanding of dyslexia as a disability and an educational difficulty is often prominent in social conceptions of this condition and, consequently, of individuals with the label dyslexia. Therefore, I intend to discuss the implications for people with dyslexia of society's views of a disabling condition and because these views can prevent the proper understanding of the ability of people described as dyslexic, an investigation into the discourses which influence the social construction of disability is necessary.

Discourses of disability and their influence on social expectations of dyslexia with reference to The Social and The Medical Models of disability

As I am arguing that discourses within the areas of power can shape the relationships of people with dyslexia within social structures which in turn shape the identity and perceptions of people with dyslexia as social entities, I contend that further discussion of discourse theories is required

Discourse theories are concerned with the role of meaningful social practices and ideas in social and political life They aim to study the effects of different systems of meaning or discourses and how they shape individuals' understanding of their social roles. The benefit of the discourse approach is twofold. First, it has the capacity to combine the concepts outlined earlier into a coherent yet flexible conceptual framework through which the different strands of the research can be drawn together in the final overall analysis.

Second, and importantly, in light of the previous discussion, analysis in terms of discourse allows for an understanding of the relationship between dyslexia and the experience of individuals who are identified within this category In this way we are able to bridge the structure/agency discord allowing for a more multidimensional analysis of this term in relation to individual experience and sociocultural values. As we have discussed in the previous chapter, expectations of discourses of disability and social understanding of dyslexia are often perceived as inconsistent In order to understand more fully this discrepancy, an exploration of the impact language makes in informing social awareness of the meanings represented within these terms is required

Although the 'official' definition for 'disability' is not a definitive representation, its accreditation is enhanced by its inclusion in an official Act. However, as I have identified, discourses of disability are also reinforced through the Medical and Social Models of disability. I acknowledge that not all issues can be addressed within these models. As Oliver and Barnes (1998) states, these models should be used as templates to further our understanding of the oppression imposed on people with dyslexia and should not be seen as static approaches. However, in order to explore the social expectations of a disabling condition, I recognise that the representation of many conditions within these models can expose how society attaches certain social values to the term (Barnes et al 1999). Thus, I intend to present dyslexia within a Social and Medical Model of disability to enable an exploration of a number of interesting arguments around the social expectations of the abilities or inabilities associated with these and thus of the individuals described as disabled and in particular as dyslexic. Thus, to explore how dyslexia has been viewed as a disability, an examination of the social 'value' of the term 'disability' and how this 'value' influences the representation of dyslexia is required. As Thomas (2002) claims,

> *Referring to people with impairments as disabled signals that they belong to that group of people who cannot engage in 'normal' activities because of their 'abnormal bodily or intellectual 'deficit' or incapacity*
> (Thomas 2002:38).

Oliver (1991) states that such an outlook on disability is presented within a Medical Model of disability. Swain et al (2003) concur and claim that the Medical Model of disability infers that the inability of disabled people to access amenities or to acquire prescribed levels of ability is the result of an impairment or condition.

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This inference endorses the view that it is a lack of ability or an inability to acquire certain physical or intellectual skills which impedes an individual's capacity to carry out 'normal' activities (Oliver 1996) Thus, disability is viewed as an individual failure Overboe (1999 18) states that society perceives this inability as an *'imperfection'* or *'failure to control the body'* when compared with a perceived 'normal' bodily function Thus, this construct of disability places the onus on the individual with dyslexia and their inability to reach presumed 'normal' levels of learning as the result of the individual's inability to learn rather than any social barriers or impediments. The Medical Model of disability can affect how people with dyslexia are viewed.

The complexity of having a 'hidden' condition within the Medical Model of disability agenda

One example of the difficulty in recognising dyslexia within a disability agenda is its hidden element I contend that this hidden factor adds to the discourse associated with the credibility of dyslexia We can see from Riddick's study that some people with dyslexia felt the label dyslexia was seen by others as a derogatory term. Riddick (1996·310) says that,

> *Among both children and adults their concern about publicly using the term dyslexia was that others would ridicule them and think less of them.*

She claims that the condition 'dyslexia', for all intents and purposes, is a 'hidden' condition and because of this individuals with this condition often have to decide whether or not to reveal it to 'others' As society often perceives any 'impairment' as an undesirable feature and, accordingly, justification for applying ways to cure or manage it, this could be countered by secrecy (Swain

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2003). Thus, hiding any condition enables an individual's abilities not to be prejudged. Additionally, he/she is free to choose when to make others aware of the condition.

This view is supported by some parents whose children are dyslexic. Although Riddick found that many parents and children find receiving the official dyslexic label to be a relief, in that the condition is recognised and diagnosed, they were also hesitant to inform others of this label for fear of ridicule (Riddick 2000).The need to hide dyslexia because of perceived ridicule is also seen in Hartley and Watkins's (2001) study. They found the social perception of students' abilities not only affects students who felt they should hide their condition from others for fear of ridicule, but also that continuing to hide such features can have a devastating effect on the wellbeing of students with dyslexia because of the fear of being caught while not giving the correct information about themselves. Hartley and Watkins (2001) argue that this is more profound in students in higher education. They state that for students with dyslexia the learning environment is more stressful because of social/emotional issues associated with secrecy. Thus, many people with dyslexia will attempt to hide their dyslexia for fear of detrimental reactions from other people (Gauntlett 1990).[8]

However, should the individual ever reveal his/her condition, its credibility may be undermined if the individual's abilities have surpassed social expectations of them. In this context, dyslexia may be thought of as once again simply a reading or writing difficulty. Thus, if an individual with dyslexia is seen undertaking a course in higher education, others may consider their label of

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[8] The ways in which people with dyslexia deal with a condition which is often hidden to others is discussed in the next chapter in relation to self-concept and sense of identity.

dyslexia fraudulent (Gaunteltt 1990) If this is the case, it is hardly surprising that many individuals with dyslexia do not reveal their condition to others unless they have to

Such social connotations surrounding the features of dyslexia may also be reinforced by public representations of the condition. Evidence concerning why some people with dyslexia considered hiding their condition found it due, in part, to the presentation and public exposition of the condition (Dale and Taylor 2001). Studies have found that

dyslexia is a hidden disability and as such often fails to attract the same levels of understanding and consequently support, that other more visible disabilities demand (Morris and Turnbull 2007·104)

These conceptions also reinforce other links to the ability of people with the dyslexic label. One example of this is the link between poor reading ability and intellect Dale and Taylor (2001) found that people often link the two issues together. These links can have devastating outcomes as suggested by a qualified PhD graduate who, whenever applying for job, rarely got an interview He states.

> *One gets the impression that people still see my dyslexia as a handicap to doing a job, rather than seeing the quality of someone who has gained the required skills despite having dyslexia, and who may have a different/ alternative viewpoint on a subject' (Batty in Gilroy and Miles 1996).*

Furthermore, Hunt argues that the meaning or social understanding of the term 'disability' is often conceptualised within absolute or definitive constructs Hunt (1966) states that the specific social expectation of a person diagnosed or labelled as 'blind' is that they will not be able to see at all However, Hunt claims that very few people registered blind will have no sight at all. Many people with this label will have some visionary capability. However, when people labelled

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as blind are perceived as having some sight, doubt surrounding the credibility of the person's condition and so their right to be labelled as such may occur. I contend that such static constructs are also true in how society envisages the description of a person with dyslexia. The continual references to dyslexia within official definitions as a disabling condition and a reading and writing difficulty encourage this conceptualisation. Consequently, many in society will expect people with dyslexia to have little or no ability in reading and writing skills.

However, those individuals with dyslexia who demonstrate a level of literacy equivalent to the demands of higher education and are successful at that level confound official and societal expectations of the condition of dyslexia. This reinforces those perceptions of doubt that can arise in society around the credibility of dyslexia as a disability. These doubts are not only raised by people who are not dyslexic, but also sometimes expressed by those who describe themselves as having this condition.

Social expectations of disability are, then, often at odds with those of people with dyslexia. Whereas social expectations are formulated through a narrow static interpretation of disability, the people who are labelled disabled often do not see things the same way. One reason why some people with dyslexia do not regard themselves as disabled is that the DDA (1995) and subsequent Acts misrepresent them and fail to acknowledge their capabilities.

Reid and Kirk (2001:11) state:

> *The use of the word [disability] is very emotive and can be very meaningful to the dyslexic person, especially since that person, as is the case with most 'disabled' people, has considerable ability and potential.*

They argue that this is due in part to official descriptions or classifications of the term disabled This is an important point as its significance in relation to the capabilities of dyslexic people needs to be heard and understood *'In the absence of such sensitivity, the notion of disability becomes exaggerated and misunderstood'* (Reid and Kirk 2001:11) Thus, in the absence of a more inclusive representation of a disabling condition an often fixed and misleading understanding of dyslexic issues may cause people to have difficulty in perceiving dyslexia as belonging within the disability agenda.

Furthermore, some official definitions not only influence the meaning of both 'disability' and dyslexia but when they are presented within the Medical Model of disability they are often seen to justify social interpretation and understanding in relation to individuals described as dyslexic As shown previously, the language used in DDA and educational Acts concerning the definition of a disabling condition is often at odds with official and public expectations of the difficulties surrounding dyslexia. McLaughlin (2004) reinforces such thoughts stating that many people would argue that those with dyslexia are quite capable of carrying out normal day-to-day activities and, therefore, do not conform to the official definition of a 'disability'. From this perspective, an assumption could be made that anyone able to function within the sense of 'getting by' in the social world should not be deemed disabled furthering the argument against viewing dyslexia as a valid disabling condition It is only when one explores the work evolving from researchers such as Miles (2006), Snowling (2000), Ott (1997) and Pollak (2005) that one realizes the misrepresentation and misunderstanding associated with dyslexia and can envisage where such misinformation is given credence. Thus, the confusion surrounding

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characteristics of the dyslexic label and the difficulty in relating a person's ability to this condition has, at times, been completely ignored. As Riddick (2000: 656) states

> *In some cases teachers stated quite clearly that they did not believe in the concept of dyslexia so in having no intention of looking for specifics within child factors and their interaction with the educational environment they inevitably made incorrect attributions of negative environmental factors at home or within child factors, such as slowness or laziness. Other teachers were neutral about the concept of dyslexia or learning difficulties in that they didn't know what it was or how to identify it.*

However, Peer (2005) argues that a mental impairment should include learning difficulties, and 'normal day to day activities' should include memory skills or the ability to concentrate, learn or understand.

> *It would therefore appear that those experiencing persistent difficulties related to dyslexia would be included in the definition of disability' (Peer 2005:155 in Reid).*

When this is added to the complexity of differences experienced by many people with dyslexia when achieving certain goals, it reinforces the realization that people with dyslexia do struggle within society.

These mixed messages associated with the Medical Model of disability often define individuals labelled as such in negative terms. Morris (1991) argues that often the stereotypical understanding of the term 'disabled' signifies people within this category as victims unable to attain specific levels of achievement without society's control and care and ignores or questions the right to be acknowledged as disabled those people whose condition does not warrant or need such control and care (Morris 1991).

However, many people with dyslexia do not view themselves as a victim of the condition. Riddick points out many people with dyslexia have commented on being happy with the label · even if it is only on a private level of acknowledgement. That is to say they will not mention it to others but are pleased with the reference. Riddick (2000; 664) states,

It also allows individuals the chance to identify with the culture of dyslexia and, in doing so, start to empower themselves

However, identifying with dyslexia within the Medical Model of disability often does not lead to empowerment. As we have stated, the inclusion of dyslexia within a Medical Model encourages the view that the term dyslexia as a disabling condition is socially constructed and prompts its perception as an inability or dysfunction in the person's capacity to achieve certain learning criteria. When either the person overachieves or seems to overcome these difficulties, it appears the validation of the label of dyslexia or disability is in question.

Therefore, I contend that the static definitions of dyslexia within official documents, the differences with which many people with this label may present which are outside the simplified criteria for both dyslexia and/or a disability, especially when these differences constitute the hidden element of the condition, not only intensify the doubt or lack of credibility of some individuals to be described as dyslexic but also reinforce the doubt surrounding the credibility of dyslexia to be seen as a genuine disabling condition Consequently, we can see why Elliott (2005) and Stringer (2009) have voiced doubt surrounding the credibility of dyslexia as a medical and disabling condition.

This reference of dyslexia as a personal inability to achieve certain levels of literacy skills has also been seen in studies of employment. Louvet (2007) found that many people with dyslexia feel that 'others', including work colleagues and employers, perceive dyslexia as a metaphor for 'poor' intelligence or slow abilities. McLaughin's (2004) study found that even with legal stipulations, many people with dyslexia have problems proving that employers have been discriminatory in a job interview or in selection procedures. He found that some people with dyslexia, when trying to claim for unfair treatment from employers, were sometimes dismissed from the court. For this reason McLaughlin states *'never assume that they are automatically entitled to protection under the Act'* (McLaughlin 2004:181).

As Louvet (2007:298) states: *'whether employers perceive an individual with a disability to be capable of performing a job is dependent on stereotypes about disability and job fit'.* Louvet (2007: 298) found that judgement of individuals is often dependent on pre-conceived ideas of the specific condition. He states:

> *Persons with more visible disabilities were less likely to be chosen for jobs requiring higher amounts of public contact. In the same way, participants did not choose a partner with dyslexia for a verbal task, although this person performed slightly better than the average. These results can be explained by poor fit between the nature of the disability and the nature of the task or job, independent of real performance or competence.*

McLaughlin (2004) also found that many workers with dyslexia are discriminated against by their work colleagues. His study found that people with dyslexia were often hesitant to disclose their dyslexia for fear that work colleagues would have a detrimental view of their abilities if they did. Morris and Turnbull (2006:101) found that many nurses who have dyslexia do not disclose it or only tell a few people for fear of social ridicule or because it might adversely

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affect employment prospects. The apprehensions of these nurses could arise from their understanding that individuals sometimes develop misplaced conceptions of the abilities of people with dyslexia (Morris and Turnbull 2007) This is interesting as nurses with dyslexia, like all qualified nurses, must have passed the relevant academic examinations (thus, must have 'good' literacy skills) The study found evidence that some people were worried about the ability of nurses with dyslexia and concerns arose around their ability in reading and writing (Morris and Turnbull 2007). Although no evidence has been found to substantiate these concerns, they are voiced in certain nursing journals and in the popular nursing press (cited in Morris and Turnbull 2007)

Once again the failure to understand dyslexia as a 'valid' condition could be due, in part, to its often inconsistent combination of characteristics which may not be present within the social perceptions of a condition deemed to be a disability However, I suggest that most tensions surrounding dyslexia are not due to the difficulties of having this condition. Oliver (1996) argues that the tensions which surround the attainment by an individual of the correct education or employment are not due to the condition itself but to social barriers and prejudice   Oliver (1996) claims that the Social Model of disability provides a more valid reason why some people labelled disabled fail to achieve in society

The Social Model of Disability and its influence on social expectations of dyslexia as a disability

The Medical Model claims that the failure to achieve the required levels of learning by a person with dyslexia is because of their condition The Social Model states that it is the social, environmental and attitudinal aspects of

society which prevent people with a disabling condition attaining the required levels of support and equal opportunities (Oliver 1996). As Barnes et al (1999:30) state:

> *Measures of disability should provide a way of monitoring the effects of physical, social and economic disabling barriers experienced by disabled people – their social exclusion – and the impact of anti-discriminatory policies.*

In this respect people with dyslexia are often prevented from achieving certain learning requirements because of a poor teaching environment or a detrimental attitude from an employer rather than poor learning skills or lack of ability. Evidence of this is seen in Dale and Taylor's (2001) study. They found that difficulties with learning regimes for some people with dyslexia were not due to an inability to learn but to a lack of understanding of their difficulties by their schools and teachers and of a format conducive to learning for a person with dyslexia. They argue that social barriers impede people with dyslexia in achieving their aims. Thus, an inability to attain certain educational goals by people with dyslexia could be due to inappropriate teaching skills and not to poor learning abilities.

Understanding that an inability to succeed is not necessarily a reflection on personal capability can be empowering. The empowering process is evident in a study from Dale and Taylor (2001:106) who report that one reason given by a respondent for her decision not to progress into higher education was because of *'inadequacies of support offered'* and not because of her dyslexia. Dale et al state:

> *This shift in her perception resonates with a Social Model of disability, drawing attention towards disabling barriers and away from individual deficits* (2001:106).

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This example demonstrates how some people with dyslexia, if aware of society's oppression, view their choices accordingly. This view of moving ones view from personal inability to societal barriers is also acknowledged by Riddick (2000 664) who claims,

> *Dyslexia in many ways exemplifies the social model of disability in that before mass literacy dyslexia was not a widespread problem and it is societal changes that have created dyslexia.*

This view of societal barriers infers a different view of certain hindrances to learning and challenges the concept held by many in the educational institution that there is a correlation between literacy skills and the overall ability to learn. As discussed previously, this failure to understand dyslexia as both a condition and a disability has been identified within both the medical and social approach to disability and within certain official legal documentation of disabling conditions. Gilroy and Miles (1996) state that inconsistencies within the syndrome or cluster of differences which form the dyslexic condition, but which may be expressed in varying forms of difficulties in different individuals, further impact on the validity surrounding dyslexia as a medical and disabling condition. This inconsistency has further enforced the doubt that surrounds this condition as a disabling condition, which conclusively informs an individual's identity as someone with dyslexia

These findings are the source of much debate in many quarters including the media[9], the political arena[10] and some parents of children who are dyslexic[11].

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[9] As seen in Despatches programme 'Dyslexic Myth' 2006 BBC Channel 4

[10] A Labour MP has claimed dyslexia is a myth invented by education chiefs to cover up poor teaching methods Backbencher Graham Stringer, MP for Blackley, describes the condition as a "cruel fiction" that should be consigned to the "dustbin of history" ·accessed 4th April 2009 online
http://samedifference1 com/2009/01/15/dyslexia-a-%E2%80%98myth%E2%80%99-the-dornes-effect/

[11] See Gilroy and Miles (1996)

Criticisms concerning credibility have been voiced in TV programmes including 'The Dyslexic Myth' in 2006, which attracted so much criticism that the British Parliament 's review of this programme's stand, which inferred a doubt concerning the conditions credibility, officially reinforced the validity of dyslexia as a genuine disabling condition.

Thus, although there are arguments that understanding conditions such as dyslexia within the Social Model approach can empower people's understanding of themselves and their abilities, there are also critics of this model.

Thomas (1999) argues that some political aspects of the Social Model agenda are too heavily dependent on exploring disability issues as social-structural barriers, thus ignoring the cultural or personal experiences of the individual. Thomas (1999:25) states,

> [the] problem which has been identified is that the interests of people who have particular forms of impairment, or pathologized differences, are seen to be ill served or under-represented by the Social Model because their experiences and needs do not 'fit' the model – for example people with learning difficulty.

This implies that the Social Model also projects a specific social understanding of disability. Because it strives to sustain a political ideal, the Social Model presents disabled people as one homogenous group but fails to represent all disabled people. This construct implies that all disabled people's experiences of oppression and discrimination are encountered on an equal and similar basis. Conversely, Oliver (1996:41) states the 'Social Model of disability is not a substitute for social theory', in effect it is a tool to support and empower disabled people.

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However, ignoring individual experience suggests a hierarchy of experience by which one form of disabling condition is presented in relation to another and often in opposition to other forms of disabling conditions I suggest that because the Social Model agenda equates all disabled people as a homogenous group, society finds it difficult to relate the experiences of people who are dyslexic to other forms of disabling conditions such as those described as physical or life threatening Thus, referring to disabled people as a homogenous group not only segregates them from other 'groups' but prevents the wider recognition of dyslexia as a disabled condition

However, as I stated previously, in order to explore how dyslexia has been compartmentalized, it is not only necessary to understand how discourses of disability have influenced the experience and understanding of dyslexia, but also how discourses of education have influenced both the experience of having this condition and social expectations of the educational ability of those with dyslexia.   Thus, this necessitates an exploration of the discourses of education which underpin most British compulsory schooling systems.

Discourses of education and their influence on notions of learning concerning children with dyslexia

Education draws upon and interacts with certain interpretations of people and places Educational messages are transmitted through language, practices and the institutional identity I will refer to these as educational discourses Thus, discourses of education as a theoretical concept will be discussed.

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The capacities of education are influenced by institutions, people and places. Singleton et al (2001) in their report on students with dyslexia in higher education stated that higher educational establishments need to provide differing learning experiences and approaches in order to provide students with dyslexia equal opportunities to learn. However, learning is not only facilitated through teaching but also the social, cultural and political influences present in society including race, age, disability and gender and the influences of staff, students, parents and peers (Pollak 2005). This influence on learning/teaching is also projected through space including classrooms, types of school and also funding criteria. All these aspects can inform the learning criteria of the environment people attend. For example, Pollak (2005) found that parents of children with dyslexia were important sources of information for their children about the condition and also provided support and information to inform schools of the support their children required. Sources of support and information are important as Humphrey et al (2002:35) found,

> *The vast majority [of children] had had extremely negative experiences at school before they had been properly identified. Most worryingly many of these experiences involved their class teachers calling them stupid, lazy or slow...in conclusion, I firmly believe that a combination of early identification, a more appropriate educational environment and, where necessary, intervention to enhance the developing self, can provide a grounding for children with dyslexia to feel valued.*

Thus, the analytical purpose of this section is to consider the discourses which dominate the educational systems and their influence on the experiences of children and students who are described as dyslexic. I contend that as people with dyslexia are also subject to social representations and explanations of what constitutes a disabling condition such perceptions can also gain reliability with people described as dyslexic.

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Levels of achievement impact on people's expectations to succeed and it is interesting to see that even with legal insistence on support and provision for children with dyslexia, evidence suggests that many children with dyslexia are still struggling to gain the provision to enable them to learn on an equal footing with their peers. Humphrey et al (2002) records the horrific and undermining experiences of students within the educational system He found in his study of school children that 'children with dyslexia in mainstream schools felt isolated and excluded' (Humphrey et al 2002:34).

Furthermore, Burden (2005) claims that whilst dyslexic friendly teaching environments can be beneficial to children with dyslexia, it is more important that the attitudes of teachers and peers towards these children are positive Johnson (2004) argues that learning difficulties associated with dyslexia should be addressed in a dyslexic friendly format to enable individuals with dyslexia to learn[12] However, when the education system is challenged to be inclusive of children with dyslexia it will defend its reluctance to change through reverting back to individualistic explanations of the child's inadequacies (Pollak 2005), thus referring to the Medical Model of disability. Inevitably, although many have argued that dyslexic friendly schooling should be regarded as environmentally beneficial to both the school's teaching system and children's access to the relevant learning requirements (Reid 2005, MacKay 2005, Johnson 2004) and in consideration of the Medical Model approach, many would surmise that it is the child's inability to learn and, consequently, that changing the teaching system would be unnecessary.

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[12] Please see also Reid 2005a, MacKay 2005, and Johnson 2004 on the positive learning environment of dyslexic friendly schooling

Similarly, in Higher Education, moves toward dyslexic friendly schooling have also been less than forthcoming. This could be due, in part, to discursive practices within the higher education establishments in many of these organizations. Thus, the change in the development of higher education teaching since the 1970s is not a linear process but 'a *complex tapestry of interwoven developments*' (Land 2004:1), which have taken form due to changes in world economic and political pressures marked by rapid and massive changes in information and uncertainty around such issues as revenue and employment. These changes have made it necessary for Higher Educational institutions to turn their attention towards more vocational needs linked to the global economy. When these changes are also charged to include accessibility to those with disabilities, confusion in the structure of support is often the result.

Thus, although Pollak (2005) discusses the benefits of the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), which includes students who are diagnosed as dyslexic, in that Higher Educational establishments must make 'reasonable adjustments' for students with learning requirements, the vagueness of this support is such that it is not always beneficial in enabling society to understand its necessity or the type of support given to students with dyslexia. One example of this is seen in the report by Singleton et al (2001) which argues the support people with dyslexia require is not simply added adjustments to already formed teaching environments, but that students who are dyslexic require the correct encouragement to learn which can mean untraditional learning styles being accepted and the provisions to decrease the 'effects' of their dyslexia. However,

in this context as with the child's schooling, the onus is on a Medical Model of disability in that it refers to the difference in an individual's unorthodox learning skills, rather than the educational system's prohibitive teaching techniques

However, even with detrimental learning experiences some people with dyslexia are determined to enter Higher Education (HE). Whilst these may not be solely accredited to dyslexia, it does imply that difficulties in areas such as literacy are not always a preventative to continuing to try. An example of this resolve is seen in Illingsworth's (2005 43) study in which many of his respondents demonstrated a high level of determination in trying to achieve their goals. He quotes one respondent as saying, *'so I can't spell and I can't type but that doesn't mean I don't have to aim high'.*

However, the issue here is not whether some people with dyslexia will have the determination to enter HE establishments or not but why they are able to identify themselves, in view of social expectations, as able to succeed in these academic establishments To put it another way, how do some individuals with dyslexia, while associating their dyslexia with their ability or difference feel able to enter into HE Furthermore, Pollak's (2005.158) study, which was mainly 'confined to students who had been formally identified as dyslexic and had sought Student Services or Learning Support', stated that more research is needed to explore the emotional aspects of living with and understanding the term dyslexia both when it is associated with one's ability and when it is referred to by the public. Consequently, in view of the lack of relevant research in this area, I propose to go one step further and investigate students who have described themselves as dyslexic, officially diagnosed or not, to understand

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how living with this description has influenced their identity as individuals with dyslexia.

Consequently, this poses the question, in view of the social values and definitions surrounding discourses of dyslexia and the social expectations of conditions deemed to be disabling which are also implicated within certain educational and disabling acts, how do individuals who describe themselves as dyslexic inform their sense of identify?

Conclusion

This chapter highlighted how the term 'dyslexia' has been fashioned through various channels, often as a medical condition portrayed as a reading and writing difficulty and shaped and influenced by cultural and social values, which have been sustained and/or transformed by action within various social institutions; in this case, scientific knowledge and definition, policies, including Acts, knowledge and practice. Additionally, media has an influence in many ways on the 'idea' of dyslexia.

It has demonstrated how discourses of dyslexia, within a medical anomie and a disability discussed within the Medical and Social Models of disability, create tensions and confusion around the validity of 'dyslexia' as a valid condition and disability. In particular how social perceptions of dyslexia can influence both social opinion and individual experience; specifically, how social representations and inferences can enforce definite representations and understanding of dyslexic issues.

Furthermore, the complexity of meaning surrounding dyslexia demonstrates how dyslexia's accreditation as a medical 'difference', including organisational skills and poor short-term memory abilities and phonological skills, has largely been ignored This has not only meant confusion in the interpretation of the needs of people with this condition, but also doubt as to the credibility of the official definition of dyslexia as a disabling condition

I have argued that these often conflicting misrepresentations denoting the differences many people with dyslexia may experience, have often detrimentally influenced other people's reactions towards people with dyslexia. I have shown that the result of these experiences is often a lack of self-worth and self-confidence I am not stating that all representations and understandings of the term 'disability' are derived from the official definition of DDA, but I do contend that such definitions impact on social representations of a disabling condition and the social value accorded to these expectations.

I argue that one of the reasons for this inability to accredit this term as a 'genuine' condition is that even with the vast amount of research into the causation and remediation of this condition, [13] very little research has been available which identifies the social impact and the sources of social influence on the condition or the people labelled as dyslexic I maintain that comprehension of how people feel when they are labelled dyslexic and come to

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[13] Adults' understanding of childhood experiences of being labelled with this condition will be discussed (see Farmer, Riddick and Sterling 2002) as will studies which continue to represent the medical causation of dyslexia (Fawcett and Nicolson 2005, Berninger et al 2004) and the remediation of such causes (Snowling 2000 Reid and Fawcett 2005)

understand their impairments and how they feel society perceives them, have been sorely neglected.

However, the ways in which social understanding and individual awareness are influenced are complex. This, then, entails an exploration of how the construction of this condition has impacted on social expectations of its identity. However, due to the complexity of this condition and society's relationship with this label, before this thesis can explore a variety of areas to expose how they impact on individual constructions of identity with this condition, it must initially explore notions of 'identity' and in what ways an individual may adapt, reform and inform their identity.

CHAPTER 2 – THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN IDENTITY WITH DYSLEXIA

To investigate fully the meaning of 'identity' would be a mammoth task and involve exploring the concepts and constructs surrounding broader historical, theoretical, cultural and societal issues. Furthermore, many theorists argue that the label 'identity' is by no means a specific and definitive term (Du Gay et al 2000). One body of thought proclaims that the identity of an individual is constructed through discourses which are shaped and moulded through power structures. These structures signify 'difference' and then associate it with that which is seen to contribute to a 'normal' identity (Du Gay et al 2000)

Already identified in the previous chapter is how constructs and discourses surrounding the meaning of the term 'dyslexia' have often been presented within medical and educational references of difference which have widely influenced how society has identified dyslexia as different However, we need to consider how these identifying labels and references may also influence an individual's understanding of themselves when described or self-assessed as having this condition Thus, this chapter will explore how constructs of normality and difference can impact on an individual identity acknowledged as having the 'difference' described as dyslexia. Therefore, I examine how social constructs and power structures can impact on the individual's sense of self. This will then be linked to an appreciation of how individuals with dyslexia may perceive themselves, and their notions of how others perceive them and their abilities

The starting point for this chapter, then, is a discussion of the process underlying the formation of identity; in particular how people distinguish themselves from 'others' on the basis of their relationship to contemporary culture, which is society. I begin this chapter by exploring some of the key conceptual themes that flow through the thesis and which are used to illuminate the experiences undergone by dyslexic people and which impact on general conceptions of identity. More focused attention is then paid to issues surrounding informed identities, the social construction of 'normality' and 'difference', and the role of cultural discourses and power relationships. The chapter also discusses the construction of language and how power relationships impact on meanings and ideologies within language in relation to dyslexic issues. This includes power structures incorporated within labelling; the difference of having a condition with a visible or hidden signifier; reference to the social expectations of a disabling condition and dyslexia; and the stigmatising and empowering effects of the label 'dyslexia' in order to further ascertain how society has constructed various aspects of identities within these classifications.

I argue that people with dyslexia, on one level, interact within society to the extent that social 'norms' and 'values' become used as personal frames of reference. These in turn inform personal attitudes and behaviours; in this way social representation of dyslexia affects the personal impression of the 'self' of people with dyslexia. This has significant implications for their relationship with society at large and for their subsequent understanding of themselves within these constructs.

However, I contend that not all societal references are internalised by individuals but are processed and examined through a number of other references including culture, social and political structures and the individual's awareness of themselves and their abilities. Thus, I argue that to gain an understanding of how some individuals inform a personal identity living with dyslexia requires not only an awareness of the influences surrounding identities, but also of the ways in which some individuals with dyslexia have incorporated certain understandings of themselves which at times differ from dominant discourses surrounding social expectations of the abilities of people with dyslexia

Thus, this chapter introduces the rationale behind some of the theoretical perspectives which inform this thesis, highlighting the theoretical framework on which it is based Several theorists, including Mead, Goffman, Giddens, Shakespeare and Riddick have been influential in shaping these arguments. Foucault, in particular, has been my inspiration in the application of this approach to studying identity within dyslexia.

To ascertain how structures may have a bearing on identities, the previous chapter's discussion on the relationship between dyslexia and the official representation of the term 'disability' and discourses of education is continued.[1] However, in order to further the exploration surrounding some of the issues and controversies which may impact on an individual's understanding of having dyslexia, I also propose to explore how power and discourses shape certain aspects of language; in particular, the use of labelling and those individual conceptualizations which sanction and categorize as 'different' those abilities

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[1] See World Health Organisation for Diseases – Standard Rules for the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities online at whqlibdoc who int/hq/2001/WHO_DAR_O1 1 phf

recognised as not meeting the criteria which is often perceived as 'normal' achievement to ascertain how labelling has impacted on social expectations of the identity of an individual with the term dyslexia attached to them. I intend to demonstrate how labels of difference can be experienced as a stigma on personal identity and, conversely, on occasion viewed optimistically by the recipient as an optimistic and empowering reference.

By reviewing the wider context of dyslexia as a social identity, the thesis is able to provide a holistic background to the various fundamentals that together impact on individuals with dyslexia. We turn first to the focus of this chapter – the construction of identity.

Social Identity: Some conceptual themes

The notion of social identity is useful for analysing the relationship between dyslexia and personal governance. I refer here to the ways in which individuals and communities distinguish themselves, or are distinguished from one another by their social and cultural relationships. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, this includes how certain social, educational and disability agendas or 'notions' of dyslexia categorize individuals with dyslexia as being 'different' to 'others' (people who are not described as dyslexic). However, in order to explore how being viewed as different, in particular as dyslexic, may influence a sense of self or an individual's identity, this thesis must have some understanding of the ways in which social conception of difference can be internalised by the individual described as dyslexic. Therefore, how self-awareness and identity have been influenced by notions of 'normality' and 'difference' in contemporary society needs some discussion.

As Layder (2004) argues, a sense of identity helps us to identify ourselves and others, as well as the nature of our social relationships He states.

> The 'self' or 'personal identity' is how a person regards themselves and how they, and others, relate to, or behave towards themselves...the self is a centre of awareness, emotional needs and desires, in terms of which an individual reflects and acts upon his or her social circumstances. (Layder 2004:7)

There is an important point to be made here concerning the orientation between categorization and identification 'Identity can be both internal (self-definition) and external (definition for, or by, others)' (their italics) (Regan de Bere 1999:14). This has been examined by various contributors in their explanations of identity: from Mead's (1934) variation between 'I' and 'me'[2] to Layder's (2004) inner self and external self[3], and Goffman's (1969) 'impression management strategies'[4]

But how do individuals develop social identities, and how do situations influence these progressions? Various explanations have been offered. Attribution theory would claim that people tend to attribute their behaviour to circumstances or the social environment, and even though they attribute other people's behaviour to personal factors they do not see their behaviour as a combination of the two As described from University of Twente (online 2009):

> Attribution theory is concerned with how individuals interpret events and how this relates to their thinking and behavior. Attribution theory assumes that people try to determine why people do what they do. A person seeking to understand why another person did something may attribute one or more causes to that behavior. According to Heider a person can make two attributions 1) internal attribution, the inference that a person is behaving in a certain way because of something about the person, such as attitude, character or personality 2) External attribution,

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[2] Mead differentiates 'I' as unique from the 'Me', See Mead (1934) 'Mind, Self and Society'
[3] Layder's 'Social and Personal Identity Understanding yourSelf' (2004)
[4] Goffman's prominence on the importance of impression management strategies embellishes the interaction between the self image and the image presented to the public See the 'Presentation of Self in Everyday Life' (1969)

> *the inference that a person is behaving a certain way because of*
> *something about the situation he or she is in.*

This view presumes that identity is perceived as a result of the social environment or personal behaviour.

Essentialists such as Karl Popper claim that it is possible to establish an explanation of the 'truth' of how identities are experienced through discovering the reality which lies behind the appearance of the occurrence. The focus here is that an occurrence is deemed 'true' depending on whether it is discerned within realms of reality or falsehood. Whilst this view is interesting it, like Attribution theory, takes quite a static view of how people understand their world. As referenced by Statemaster (2009),

> *Essentialist positions on gender, race, or other group characteristics,*
> *consider these to be fixed traits, while not allowing for variations among*
> *individuals or over time. Contemporary proponents of identity politics*
> *including feminism, gay rights, and anti-racist activists generally take*
> *constructionist viewpoints, agreeing with Simone de Beauvoir that "one is*
> *not born, but becomes a woman", for example. However, this is a vexed*
> *issue. To the extent that essence implies permanence and inalterability,*
> *essentialist thinking tends to agree with political conservatism and*
> *mitigates against social change.*

Thus, essentialist thinking would dismiss fluidity of identity.

Interactionists, however, take a differing stance. Mead (1934) would argue that a sense of self is assimilated through external influences or social experiences, and as a personal consciousness formed through individual factors which are separate from social influence. Mead argues that the make-up of the individual identity is fluid and depends on the modification of the self to its social setting at any given time. Consequently, the process becomes multi-dimensional, concerning both structural effects and the response of the individual. Therefore, the understanding of identity is characterised by the reflexive disposition of individuals. Whilst each theory has its own merits, in light of the confusion and

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misinformation that appears at times around dyslexic issues, it seems prudent to explore how through a more fluid and multidimensional approach some people described as dyslexic may interrupt their understanding of themselves within often conflicting representations

An example of individual reflection of 'self', which has been influenced through social interaction and self-conceptualization, is observed in Fawcett's (1995) account of a child's self-esteem when encountering their teachers and peers' reactions to their abilities. Fawcett (1995) found that children categorised as dyslexic regularly encountered 'poor' reactions from teachers and pupils alike, which some children identified with to such an extent that they accommodated these experiences into a sense of 'failure to achieve' which frequently resulted in the child forming a *'depressed self-concept'* (Fawcett 1995:12) Self-concept is broadly defined by Humphrey (2002) as·

> *An organised schema that contains episodic and semantic memories about the self and controls that processing of self-relevant information (cited in Humphrey2002.29).*

However, Fawcett did not find that all the children in her study suffered from self-doubt, highlighting Layder's (2004) and Mead's (1934) arguments that individuals have a unique inner self which although subject to social pressures also performs within personal factors   The important point here is to evaluate how individuals inform their sense of self or self-esteem in view of the social pressures to which they may be subjected Humphrey et al (2002 29) description of self-esteem refers to a·

> *Personal judgement of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds towards himself.*

As Fawcett demonstrates, the feelings of worthiness expressed by these children were often reflections of others' expressions of them which they, at that

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time, internalised to form an understanding of their self-concept. Elliott (2001) agrees with this argument and states that social interaction should be seen as a gauge which we often use to understand ourselves and our abilities. He argues that,

> *The self is the agency through which individuals experience themselves in relation to others...we routinely construct our experiences of daily life in exactly this manner prodding, pushing suggesting advising...and praising as we create the flow of our actions in the social world. (Elliott 2001:26)*

This is not a new idea. Mead (1934) discussed how the performance and the self were unequivocally linked to social values and norms and at the same time reflexive and innovative. For him, meaning is associated with the general characteristics of social groupings, and the interaction between them. Therefore, meaning is not essentially apparent in anything. It is contingent, generated by the interactions of individuals within wider social groups. However, if this is the case then we should be enquiring how individuals' interactions with others inform and maintain understanding of cultural norms and values and how they influence the self- concept and identity of people described as dyslexic.

Goffman (1961, 1969) noted three distinct forms of identity, all of which arise from interaction with 'others'. First, a personal identity is shaped by features which differentiate one individual from another; second, Goffman refers to social identity, whereby the individual appears within various socially agreed collections or groups and third, Goffman claims that an ego identity appears when the individual's own distinctive and subjective sense of 'self' impacts on the individual's persona. Interactionists such as Elliott (2001) and Risman (2001) reinforce this claim and further suggest that motives and actions are generated through various circumstances and social settings (Elliott 2001; Risman in Branaman 2001). Weber (1978) describes 'motives' as a complexity

of meanings which are influential in justifying certain types of behaviour. Mills (1967:442) refers to these motives as *'cues and justifications'* which establish normative reactions to situations Thus, particular situations engage *'conventional' motives*

Layder (2004) takes this idea forward and argues that others' reactions to the individual and his/her motives 'fit' into social categories which influence notions of identity and promote the desire to appear as normal as possible. Thus, identity is influenced by social pressures and interactions with 'others' which become the motivation and desire for acceptance into 'normal' identifying categories. Therefore, in order to explore how having dyslexia has influenced individuals with the condition, an understanding of how social norms and values acknowledge and assimilate references to 'dyslexia' both as a condition and a personal reference to ability or 'difference' is important As stated previously, in order to understand these issues necessitates an awareness of the discourses which influence social perceptions of normal in terms of bodily function or intellect

Having a condition perceived as outside 'normal' perimeters of ability and its influence on the identity of people with dyslexia

Oliver et al (1998) would argue that notions of 'normality' are often influenced and regulated through a comparison with what is frequently referred to as difference or deviate constructs of bodily appearance or function This is often referred to as an abnormality of bodily function or intellectual ability Thus, identity is defined through discourses of difference, which are constructed against opposing characteristics or classifications in discursive systems As

argued in the previous chapter, in the case of an individual described as dyslexic, this difference is often portrayed as a difference in learning capacity in reading and writing.

Thus, as shown from both official social and political structures, power is not, as Foucault (1997) states, a linear concept but should be realised as a multilayered entity, permeating all facets of life, *'always alert,'* making sense of the way one lives, thinks and understands the environment (Foucault 1997:177). Therefore, the processes through which people understand are manifest within transitory language. Rouse (1994) states the location of power within language is maintained and identified through social values which are defined through 'normalisation theory'. Discourses define what is normal and what is not normal. Location of 'difference' is then seen as in need of normalising to comply with convention. Marks (1999) states the need to normalise is established within the language used concerning people perceived as or categorised as disabled. She argues that social values infer that disabled people are separated from 'normal' society as different and that difference is used as justification to sustain oppressive and discriminatory separation through language.

However, as power structures are multilayered entities which impregnate all facets of life, including social, cultural and political discursive practices and discourses of disability, living with and as representations of individual difference, it must also be acknowledged that notions of disability are fluid and evolving entities in which power fluctuates depending on the experiences and cultural idiosyncrasies associated with an individual at any given time.

Consequently, as stated previously, social representations of disability are often interpreted as a lack of normality of body function or intellectual ability

Goffman's (1968) explanation of 'difference' within social constructions of identity compartmentalises difference as contrasting with 'normal' realms of identity. In other words, individuals who are perceived as 'normal' fulfil 'others" expectations of them during interaction (Winance 2007:627). Individuals who do not fulfil such 'normalised' expectations, particularly within bodily function or ability, are exposed as having irregular 'characteristics' which Goffman describes as an 'abomination of the body' (Goffman 1968:14)

These differences in characteristics are often labelled as a specific condition or impairment and the social expectation is that individuals with such classifications should want to liberate themselves of such labels of 'abnormality'. Corker et al (1999) argues that being officially accredited with a term described as disabled is predominantly considered to be a hindrance and as an oppressive label, and can influence an individual's feelings of self-worth.

Corker argues that the definition or classification of an individual impairment as disabling is often seen as such a dominant part of an individual's identity that it is accredited within many social settings as an essential feature or condition which not only informs others of a person's make-up, but can be recognized as the main feature of their make-up (Corker 1999). This is also acknowledged by Layder (2004 75) who claims that,

> *Self-identity is seen as a kind of construction or a performance that is, consciously or unconsciously, engaged in negotiating its position, powers of agency and action in relation to others [who] regard identity as an extension of a fixed inner personality...treating as natural what is actually an appearance sustained by an ideological process .*

Clearly, in distinguishing 'difference', a precise appreciation of 'normality' needs to be realized. However, interpretations of 'normality' within an individual's make-up are also often obscure. As Oliver and Barnes (1998:150) state:

> *Clearly, this typology is founded on assumptions about the existence and nature of intellectual and physical 'normality'... [however] psychological and physical normality are not easily defined.*

However, even though the clarification of normality is ambiguous, conditions described as disabling are established through terms of difference. Oliver and Barnes (1998) state that difference is always realized as a contrast to notions of normality. Winace (2007:625) reinforces Oliver and Barnes's (1998) argument and states:

> *The notion of disability has been constructed in relation to the notion of normality'. In medical and social practices disabled people are constantly compared with normality.*

However, Mercer (2002) claims that distinct forms of classification do not necessarily imply the formation of static or fixed identities. Mercer advocates a post-structuralist argument in which relations between personal identity and social relations appear to be fluid. Thus, no absolute truth relating to individual identity endures.

The relevance of a post-structural approach here is that it enables exploration of identity within a space where no concepts or identities are final. Simply put, people can draw on or be viewed within different classification systems in different ways at different times depending on the situation in which they find themselves. An example of this is the official recognition of dyslexia as late as the 1900s. This does not mean that people did not have dyslexia before that time as the renowned Hans Christian Andersen is assumed to have been dyslexic. However, because dyslexia was not identified in his time, an individual

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would have been unable to describe themselves as such. Consequently, identity is only expressed through classifications when that particular series of features have been identified within that classification (Hacking 1986). However, even without such official verification, people now presumed to have had dyslexia still presented with the symptoms of this condition, it was simply not identified with the term 'dyslexia'. Thus, no concepts are rigid, no truths are inimitable and no identity is ever inflexible.

Furthermore, in view of the fact that most people in modern western society are expected to have high levels of literacy skills, problems with literacy skills became more prominent over time. Thus, using theories which allow for a more fluid construct of how some individuals with dyslexia may acknowledge their sense of identity with this condition is relevant, enabling a more in-depth consideration of how some people with dyslexia might form identities which are at odds with more formal constructs of a person's abilities with this condition.

To explore the fluidly of identities and experiences, this study incorporates a poststructuralist approach to understand how discourses of dyslexia, models of disability and educational institutions (discussed previously) may influence the identity of individuals described as dyslexic and also how individuals may ignore, shun or internalise such discourses in light of their own sense of understanding of themselves and their ability. As Mercer (2002 235) claims,

> *The Poststructuralist accent on listening to the range of disabled people's voices and hitherto silenced narratives .[has] allowed for much more analytical space in considering the fluidity of identities and experiences*

In view of conceptual and theoretical structures around notions of dyslexia, I contend that an exploration of the narratives of individuals who classify

themselves as dyslexic will entail a discussion of the medium in which dyslexia, classified as a disability and an educational difficulty, has been projected within the public domain. In this instance, I am referring to the discourses of language in which social understanding of these labels is fashioned (Foucualt 1975).

Foucault (1975) argues that 'difference' is presented in relation to notions of 'normality' and similarity and maintains that 'difference' is socially recognised through its comparison to social perceptions of 'normality. Thus, 'difference' is not simply a term to represent a static description but is impregnated within power structures. These power structures use language as a tool to maintain the discursive practices in which power resides. Language, then, both portrays and imposes paradigms of dyslexia as a 'difference' within these power structures.   However, whilst language can be used or understood as a justification to impose discrimination and 'difference', it can also have a detrimental effect on some people's understanding of themselves and their abilities if they experience such descriptions; in some cases this can influence an individual's sense of self-esteem.

Language used to refer to dyslexia and its influence on societal expectations of the ability of those with dyslexia

Abberley (2002:122) claims:

> *Discourse draws attention to the language of politics, not simply as a way of expressing its content, but as the very substance of it.*

To understand how language embodies discourses of dyslexia and notions of disability, it is useful to discuss Foucault's comments on the power of language. He states that language is a medium in which 'knowledge is expressed'.

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Language then is burdened through its *'historical nature with meanings and presuppositions that confuse and distort what we are trying to say'* (Foucault in Gutting 1989 195). Discourses, therefore, are constituted within language. It is through language that social recognition of terms and categories achieves significance. Foucault argues that power evolves through concepts and statements which we as social entities identify as 'truths' about the world and the people within it. He accredits these social 'truths' as fluid, fundamentally changeable, and reliant, to a certain extent, on popular beliefs given authority by those in power at any given time.

Meaning associated within language is, therefore, never static but is shaped through discourses which struggle continually to represent specific constructs of understanding. Elliott (2001:83) claims that those in positions of power endeavour to enforce and maintain 'control over the policing of discourse – of defining what is acceptable and unacceptable within specific forms of life within society at large' However, power is also never fixed. Power instead is realized as a connection between individuals and society. Thus, language is the conduit for power relations in which discourses struggle for supremacy As discussed in the previous chapter, the social 'descriptions' of dyslexia are often presented within constructs of an inability in literacy skills given credence through governmental policies and legal Acts It is important to realise here that the power which connects individuals and society is often viewed and justified through such structures as policy and legal Acts. Therefore, the wording within the Special Educational and Disability Discrimination Act (2007) can and often does present dyslexia within certain criteria If an individual is perceived as not fulfilling the criteria associated with their 'condition' then this may generate feelings of doubt and resentment in society at the extra and often expensive

support the individual requires to fulfil an educational commitment. Labelling, then, is often seen as a descriptor which guides people's actions and attitudes towards each another. Labels may also compel people to conform to a particular identity,

> *As we are often under pressure to fit, or perhaps because we have been rejected from an alternative framework which we would have chosen given the choice* (Cocker 1998:20).

The understanding of the label 'disability' is often seen to stigmatise the individual with this label within constructs of inability or abnormality. Society sometimes equates a person's inability to perform solely with its understanding of the language associated with the label and not the individual's personal ability. Very often it is very difficult to comprehend the cause of stigma, whether it is the dyslexic label or the actual difference to which the label is referring. Riddick argues that the 'two are virtually interchangeable" (Riddick 2000:655).

Therefore, language is implicit within social settings where 'true' representation of meaning is defined. Meaning and representations of language need to be placed within a social setting in order make objective their 'true' implication. Language, then, becomes significant within social settings and social constructs. However, meanings are not formed in isolation: they are formed within particular settings and discourses. Thus, terms which identify individual ability or difference in ability are also impregnated with power constructs which inform and justify society in viewing these individuals in certain ways. Put another way, individuals perceived as disabled are often viewed within certain frames of reference by a society which feels justified in imposing power structures which can discriminate against disabled people (Swain et al 2004). An example of discrimination is identified in Reid and Kirk's (2001) study of the experiences at school of children with dyslexia which found that many children

with dyslexia often encounter minimal, inappropriate or an absence of support within their school. This is often seen as a result of 'negative' reactions from teachers, including ridiculing the child's attempts to learn. Such reactions from those in authority were so influential that some children felt that bullying children with dyslexia was acceptable. Reid Kirk and (2001) further suggest these experiences could detrimentally influence a child's sense of adequacy. The main point here is that power incorporated within the actions and language used to interact with a child with dyslexia can influence others' treatment of individuals with dyslexia and detrimentally manipulate the self-esteem of some of the children who receive such treatment to such an extent that it influences a child's competence as a learner. Thus, fluidity of identities and experience are accomplished through both implicit and explicit discursive formations of language within which the social construct of dyslexia is presented. You could say that some people use their understanding of aspects of dyslexia to justify certain discriminatory attitudes and actions.

Swain et al (2003) argue that some labels arguably hold more power in society than others. Social perceptions or descriptors of man/woman, white/black, disabled/non-disabled encourage power constructs evoking indicators used for inclusion or exclusion. As Petersen et al (2007:6) reflects:

> *Scholars have emphasised how a politics of the body- involving the categorisation, labelling, and regulation of particular bodies – has operated so as to mark as different and marginalise different groups.*

Thus, this difference reflects society's power structures and discerns how individuals are positioned within such structures. Swain et al (2003) argue that being labelled as disabled can dominate individual and social recognition of an individual's ability to such an extent as to mask all other labels or descriptors

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Furthermore, the dyslexic descriptor or label is also defined through its correlation with discourses of disability; this in turn can posit the identities of people with dyslexia within frames of references of disability. Whilst I am not advocating that dyslexia should not be viewed as a disabling condition, many people with dyslexia do, however, encounter social attitudes and barriers which impede their progress within their lives, and as such I contend that the confusion and discrimination often experienced by people with dyslexia are due to the social understanding of disability formulated through discourses inherent within the medical model of disability.

Labels and their impact on notions of dyslexia

Within Reid and Kirk's study (2001) the dyslexic label as a detrimental reference was not only discussed within children's accounts. Concerns that dyslexia is an identifier of lack of ability were also expressed by some adults. Morris and Turnbull (2007:102) found that most nurses with dyslexia in their study were selective in disclosing their dyslexia to others. Reasons for this selectivity were linked to 'fears of ridicule, job loss, victimization and the belief that there is a lack of understanding in the [nursing] profession' concerning the ability of nurses with dyslexia to perform their roles adequately. This implies that they considered being described within discourses of 'normality' more beneficial in such areas as careers, than being described within discourses of 'difference'.

It is important to point out that whilst discourses of disability may produce disabled identities, not all these identities are concerned with disability roles. That is to say, the severity of disabling conditions may vary between individuals, but disabled structures and cultural awareness will inevitability exercise some

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influence over individuals in society labelled as such As Jenkins (1996 25) states

> *Social identities exist and are acquired, claimed and allocated within power relations. Identity is something over which struggles take place and with which stratagems are advanced Not only is the classification of individuals at issue, but also the classification of populations.*

Thus, constructs of power and knowledge within these classifications are modes of regulation and control and influence society's evaluation of individual ability through its recognition of the classification that individual is presented within. This further informs social expectation of the identity of the individual and because the individual is also a social being, can influence the individual's understanding of the term Thus, power relations that impact on individual identity are also inextricably linked through the social understanding which is attached to the term.

The experiences of children with dyslexia within the educational system and their effect on self-esteem

Illingsworth (2005·43) states that individuals with dyslexia often perceive others to have negative perceptions of dyslexia. This can have 'implications for self-image and cause undue stress through negative emotional responses'. Therefore, the social recognition of certain terms such as dyslexia can have an impact on the sense of self of people with dyslexia. However, the impact of social expectations of dyslexia cannot be discussed without exploring the difference in visible and invisible indicators or signifiers of 'difference' Conceptualisation within social belief has been further highlighted in reference to children's experiences within the educational system. Early diagnosis of

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dyslexia is important and children with dyslexia should receive support in their early years. However, research also establishes a definite link between inappropriate learning environments and loss of self-worth and self-esteem (Humphrey and Mullins 2002, Burden and Burden 2005; Fairhurst and Pumfrey 1992).

Westwood (2003) argues that teachers can greatly influence a pupil's feelings of self-worth. He states that actions from teachers such as giving students who are dyslexic simplistic tasks or too much help can *'cause students to believe that they are lacking in ability or that teachers believe them to be so'* (Westwood 2003 cited in Johnson 2004:245). Thus, too much support or not allowing the child to explore their capabilities can result in a child not assigning credibility to their accomplishments. Conversely, Reid and Kirk (2001) discuss how that little or no support within educational environments for children with dyslexia and a lack of understanding of their needs may affect a child's feelings of self-worth or produce a lack of confidence in their ability. Gilroy and Miles (1996) suggest that parents and councillors are often wary of what form of encouragement they should employ as they do not wish to put undue pressure on children with dyslexia to succeed. Yet too little encouragement could imply that children with dyslexia do not feel able to succeed.

Humphrey et al (2002) and Burden and Burnett (2005) have found a definite link between learning environments and lack of self-worth and self-esteem. They contend that teachers greatly influence a child's perception of his/her ability to learn and his/her association with feelings of self-esteem and confidence. Reid and Kirk (2001) suggest that the lack of learning of some children with dyslexia within the educational system is linked to low self-esteem and in some cases

depression Burden (2005) argues that feelings of poor self-esteem are almost inevitably incurred when a continual failure to develop 'foundation skills' in children is presented, and continual feelings of individual failure can accumulate into forms of depression (Burden 2005.27)

I contend that the term 'depression' is often overused and does not always refer to a medical condition. It is often used to refer to general perceptions of feeling 'down' or 'low' As feelings of depression and dyslexia have been linked within literature, this thesis will use the term as expressed within Reid and Kirk's (2001 134) description of depression and its associated symptoms *'as a lack of interest, low motivation and low self-esteem'* which could be perceived as *'outward signs of real trauma'*

Humphrey (2002) found in his study that feelings of low self-concept also stemmed from bullying and teasing by the peers of children with dyslexia. Burden (2005 27) further suggests that a continual failure to develop 'foundation skills' will almost inevitably incur feelings of poor self-esteem and depression. Reid and Kirk (2001) argue that it is critical for teachers to have an awareness of dyslexic issues. They state, 'it is not surprising to suggest that failure to identify dyslexic difficulties can lead to failure to develop literacy and can result in a cycle of failure which [has]...implications for that person's self-concept and academic self-esteem' (Reid and Kirk 2001:117).

Reid and Kirk (2001) argue that continual interaction with 'significant' others who continually highlight presumed failures to achieve can also accumulate into feelings of 'learned helplessness'. 'Learned helplessness' encourages individuals to register events and their ability to achieve as outside their control and unchangeable and, therefore, *'nothing [they] do will work, and [they] give up*

trying' (Burden 2005:25). This then leads to a 'learned helplessness' in which children with dyslexia accredit any difficulties and problems to '*their general stupidity*' and not to outside circumstances or barriers. As we can see from this formation of an individual view of ability, the child is screening themsleves within discourses inherent within the medical model in which the individual's condition is blamed for their 'failings'. Burden states that these judgements of the self can further impact on feelings of depression and diminished self-confidence (Burden 2005:24). Thus, the evidence supports the theory that experiences within the educational system can have long-term effects on the confidence of many individuals who are described as dyslexic (Burden and Burnett 2005).

Humphrey et al (2002) found that feelings of low self-esteem were also seen to occur when children who were dyslexic were bullied or teased by their peers because of their difficulties in the classroom. Clearly, then, there is a need for the educational system to provide adequate and relevant support for children described as dyslexic in order to stem or resist such detrimental feelings.

Nevertheless, whilst a lack of support, a poor teaching environment or poor teaching methods and peer pressure do appear to impact on individual feelings of self-worth, which is correlated to academic self-esteem, it must be acknowledged that this lack of self-worth is not experienced as a socially isolated aspect of the learning environment. It is interesting to see that the differences in the learning abilities of children with dyslexia are not solely dependent on the degree or level of dyslexia, but have also been correlated, in some respects, to the child's gender. Thomson (1995:42) states:

> *The problem of dyslexic girls can appear on the surface to be subtly different from those of the boys and may emerge at a rather later stage. Some seem to learn to read reasonably efficiently, but for them this is a*

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> *mechanical decoding exercise and their difficulties lie more in the area of information, processing, comprehension and organisational skills*

Thus, although girls and boys may have differing learning abilities at differing times, the overall impact of teaching necessitates relevant support and confidence building to dismiss the stress many children with dyslexia encounter within educational environments. Thomson (1995) states that the child who is challenged and supported to succeed within their abilities will gain in strength and confidence enabling them to continue to cope in adulthood The child who fails to obtain the required level of support and understanding may well present with a lack of self-regard which could *'undermine motivation and shatter confidence'* (Thomson 1995.47). The significance of this is that not only can children with dyslexia experience difficulties within the educational system which will influence their self-esteem, but the understanding of that experience may be relative to the gender of the child and, consequently, influence identity in differing ways.

This view of how to encourage pupils to succeed and to prevent people with dyslexia from becoming stressed within the educational system is not only pertinent to children's experiences Students who are dyslexic also attend at institutions of Higher Education.

Higher Education and its influences on the expectations of people with dyslexia

Hartley and Watkins (2001) argue that many students with dyslexia in Higher Education suffer higher levels of stress than their non-dyslexic counterparts because of the lack of relevant support. They state.

The Higher Education(HE) environment introduces a number of potential stressors for the dyslexic student, which are further impacted by the lack of structure and individual academic support compared to that available at school' (Hartley and Watkins 2001:1).

Gilroy and Miles (1996) suggest that students in Higher Education may benefit from guiding the process themselves. As Gilroy and Miles (1996:17) state:

*The first suggestion which we should like to make to anyone who is thinking of going to college is: **do not be afraid of taking risks.** In our experiences, the ability of a dyslexic person is often underestimated – and this is not merely by her teachers but often also by herself.*

This view that students who are dyslexic may have high levels of stress within this environment is also discussed within Singleton's report (2001) on Higher Education and dyslexia. It suggests that extra support should be sought to aid students with dyslexia in an attempt to decrease stress levels.

Reid and Kirk argue that the educational authorities have largely ignored the needs and requirements of adults with dyslexia, in that dyslexia has not been sufficiently highlighted in such areas as work and college due to its continual *'prominence within the mainstream educational policies for children'* (Reid and Kirk 2001:11). Morris and Turnbull (2007) also found evidence of lack of confidence in nurses in academia. They state that despite over 62% of nurses achieving success in postgraduate qualifications, over 19% were reluctant to take further study because of fears concerning the intensity of academic study.

According to Hartley and Watkins (2001) part of the difficulty in giving support to students in Higher Education is having a clear view of the type of support required to decrease students' levels of stress. They argue that as providing support is expensive, understanding what support is beneficial requires more research. To achieve this knowledge requires more evidence concerning what

stresses students with dyslexia in these environments. Hartley and Watkins (2001:1) state,

> It is necessary to understand more about the nature and precursors of stress in dyslexic students, and which coping strategies might be most effective.

However, this is not a simple task. Pumfrey (2001) found that there is a continual increase in students who are dyslexic attending Higher Education including universities which only adds to the complexity of the situation Farmer et al (2002) state that attendance at university by students diagnosed as dyslexic has increased by over 41% in the five years since 1999 (Farmer et al 2002: viii) Singleton's report (2001) also found that 1 1% of students who attended Higher Education(HE) were dyslexic and that 0.8% students entered who were only diagnosed after entering higher education Thus, it appears that even in view of the stresses attached to this undertaking people with dyslexia are not only seeking to enter a conceivably 'hostile' environment but internalising and accommodating 'difference' in a need to continue into Higher Education and to believe themselves able to continue in this environment The question is then why and in what respect do these individuals feel able to continue on this path

Pollak (2005) suggests that some increase is due to the increase in the recognition of dyslexia in children and adults alike which will ease accessibility for mature students into higher education, thus swelling the numbers of students with dyslexia. There is also the argument that increased awareness of dyslexia within educational institutions has enabled more support and better teaching environments enabling students to succeed and to learn strategies for learning, which then influence their thoughts of success within Higher Education (Pollak 2005). However, it is also recognised that it is not only students with

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supportive or 'constructive' experiences who generate the levels of motivation necessary to access these establishments. Pollak (2005) found that many students who received little support during their schooling also attend universities. However, Peelo (2002) argues that this is not an easy option for many students with dyslexia. She highlights how many students attending Higher Educational establishments will find it extremely difficult to succeed and will often struggle to attain the relevant levels of achievement in this environment (Peelo 2002).

Peelo (2002) argues that whilst students experience failure within Higher Education for many reasons, failing within this context is invariably experienced as problematic or distasteful. This raises the question, why do people who may have experienced difficulty previously wish to continue in Higher Education (Pollack 2005).

One could argue that success in Higher Education might only be achievable for individuals with dyslexia who feel they have had 'positive' experiences, both within their schooling and within their interactions with others. The evidence suggests that people with dyslexia that have had detrimental experiences and have low self-confidence and low self-esteem, particularly in their literacy abilities, would be hesitant to attend higher education. Yet Pollak (2005) found that a number of people diagnosed as dyslexic and considered to have low levels of self-confidence still attended higher educational institutions such as universities. Pollack (2005:143) found that even though some students with dyslexia 'approached academic life unconfidently believing that the 'cards were stacked against them,' they still pursued the university option. Pollak's study is

both revealing and illuminating in its exploration of how some individuals make sense of their abilities as students

The issue is, then, why is it that some individuals are able to accommodate their condition within an identity which is conducive to their endeavours to succeed within such a (for many people with dyslexia) 'hostile' environment In view of the argument that many people with dyslexia often encounter some difficulties around their learning requirements in academic environments, (due to social barriers in teaching environments) and in view of the potential higher level of academic study which students must engage in to attain a degree level, and the evidence which highlights the potential high levels of stress that many people cope with when working as students within these establishments, the question arises, how do individuals with dyslexia attending Higher Education perceive their abilities and their dyslexia? Although Pollack has explored some of the issues surrounding some students diagnosed as dyslexic, little has been explored concerning how individuals make sense of and interpret social representations and interactions in their understanding of themselves as people with dyslexia. Given Hartley and Watkins's (2001) claim that further studies are needed to understand what levels of stress individuals with dyslexia encounter in Higher Education, it is important to ascertain what support is required. Not only is this research vital in adding to the evidence for supporting students but also in demonstrating how an individual's understanding of themselves and their identity can help in furthering society's understanding of how having dyslexia can influence the concept of self and identity

To explore such issues and in view of the previous argument on the influence of dominant discourses surrounding dyslexia, it requires an investigation into what

effect impressions of social reactions and interactions have on personal experience and what part do these social exchanges play in a personal understanding of living with dyslexia and how do these interactions and a personal understanding of these experiences, this social awareness, affect an individual's expectation of themselves as someone with dyslexia, thus their identity. Pollak (2005:111) argues that students in higher education who have dyslexia are likely to identify themselves within four differing discourses: that of 'the patient' as a person prone to view their dyslexia as a medical anomie and in which they present any difficulties in academic ability as a personal lack of capability, 'the student' in which individuals interpret their difficulties in academic ability in terms of frustration in what they see as a *'discrepancy between their intelligence and academic performance'*; the 'hemespherist' in which individuals are more likely to view their dyslexia *'as a difference rather than a disability'* and identify with more successful people who are dyslexic; and finally the 'campaigner' in which students adopt a more political struggle and view themselves as having to fight for both their own rights and support but also devote energy to lobbying for the rights of people with dyslexia.

Whilst these discourses are invaluable in gaining insight into how some people with dyslexia perceive their ability or lack of it as a person with dyslexia, it also leaves a lot of questions unanswered. In presenting these four discourses, Pollak risks categorizing identity into so many pigeon holes. Even though he states that individuals may position themselves within more then one discourse, his classifications still appear restrictive in that they fail to acknowledge any adaption by the individual with dyslexia to the roles prescribed for them in these discourses or the effect of that 'adaption' on self-awareness. However, Pollak's work encourages investigation into the influences on the individual with dyslexia

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and the role those influences play in that person's awareness of themselves while they fulfil the criteria of context and expectation His work, though valuable, fails to acknowledge the individual's response to their condition and the influence society brings to bear. His list is informative in that it describes some of the negotiations in which an individual with dyslexia must involve themselves. But it fails to engage with how dyslexia can influence the concept of self and identity The onus on all four discourses is that they are structured into social categories, but how and in what respects individuals formulate their understanding of these categories is not addressed. For example, the 'hamispherist's view themselves as different rather than disabled' but is this entirely correct? Does this not depend on what they understand as disabled? And in what ways do they view this 'difference' as other than 'disabled'?

This view presupposes that these individuals are presenting the term disabled within a medical model of disability in contrast to Pollak's argument that the 'hemispherist' perceives their dyslexia as 'akin to the social model of disability' (2005:111). Accordingly, as I have discussed, it is not the person who removes themselves from the term 'disability' but that the label takes on a more social connection, rather the individual's concept of disabled appears within the medical model but their perception of dyslexia negates this term Dunne et al (2002) found that respondents often redefined their understanding of the label as personal meanings of empowerment. They reconstructed their meaning of these terms to repress social prejudice and endeavoured personally to normalise their living environment and their sexuality. These young people redefined the label and through their narratives they incorporated a positive sense of self, seeing themselves as heroes, not victims, within the term. Therefore, redefining the meaning of the term for it to represent a more

personal depiction of the individual as struggling against adversity and social stigma.

In order to more fully explore these discrepancies requires more investigation into how individuals not only experience having the label dyslexia but also how certain features of dyslexia can influence individual action. This, then, requires not only evidence of how students' experiences may influence their thoughts of having this condition but also how society has presented dyslexia and how this might impact on an individual's actions and recognition of themselves as a person with dyslexia.

These issues raise an important point, especially if we take into account that many employment prospects are only attainable, in the most part, through relevant qualifications. That is, the more professional the position or career choice the higher the relevant qualification needed. This implies that intellect is akin to qualifications. This is further identified within the experiences of individuals with dyslexia in their career choices. It is important to understand that society's perceptions of an individual's abilities and limitations have huge implications on personal career or employment choices.

The employment and the employability of people described as dyslexic

The disability legislation of the DDA does not relate to many of the issues which adults with dyslexia may encounter in areas such as employment[5]. Although the Educational Acts do indeed acknowledge that dyslexia is within the disability field, most information and policies really only highlight the educational

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[5] This entitles disabled people to governmental funding and support in such areas as education and employment and the social acceptance of such funding as deserved because of the perception of a disabled person's lack of abilities?

impediments which affect people with dyslexia and ignore the vast population of adults who are dyslexic (Reid et al 2001) The continual reference to the literary inabilities of people who are dyslexic hides the other aspects which may be affected through having dyslexia. Reid et al 2001 state:

> *Dyslexia continues to undermine the performance of literate dyslexic adults They are still dyslexic, regardless of whether they have learned to read, write and spell. Returning to literacy-based definitions sets back...the understanding of dyslexia as it affects adults (Reid et al 2001:179).*

Morris and Turnbull (2007) found that some people with dyslexia felt they had been refused entry into a nursing career due to perceptions of their lack of ability to reach a desired standard of work because of their condition. Thus, employment could be seen as a stressful pursuit, in many respects, for many people However, Miles and Varma (1995) argue that people with dyslexia incur high levels of stress both in the pursuit of employment and in sustaining a position or advancing to new goals such as in promotion. However, Reid and Kirk (2001) state that adults with dyslexia are under constant pressure from employers to satisfy expectations of their employability.

Studies have also found that employers are often reluctant to provide extra support for people with dyslexia. Even with the increase of legal requirements from the DDA from 1995 onwards, the level of support for people with dyslexia has been both inconsistent in implementation and difficult to address in view of the differing needs of people with dyslexia A study by Hoffman et al (1987) found that only 24% of employers had made modifications to the workplace for employees who were dyslexic. However, Morris and Turnbull (2007) also found that the lack of confidence in some people with dyslexia had impacted on their promotional prospects (Morris and Turnbull 2007). They stated that over 73% of

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nurses questioned said their dyslexia had detrimentally influenced their progression in their career. They state:

> By far the most commonly cited reason for this was perceived to be a lack of confidence in their ability to undertake career-enhancing academic study (44.8%, n ¼ 52). Being dyslexic has caused me since childhood to doubt my abilities academically. I·therefore sat at the level of E grade longer than my colleagues as I lacked confidence... and couldn't always express myself as others could (Stoma Care Nurse)' (Morris and Turnbull 2007:103).

The main point here is that lack of confidence in achieving academically led them to believe they did not have the ability to progress.

Illingsworth (2005) found that some people with dyslexia were hesitant to disclose their condition to employers for fear of detrimental repercussions. He states that many nurses described as dyslexic were hesitant to disclose their dyslexia for fear of being prejudged on ability. Riddick (2000) also found that whilst parents felt relief when their children were labelled dyslexic, they often did not want that label made public outside educational establishments for fear of ridicule. Thus, the 'hidden' aspect of this condition may also influence an individual's experiences and perceptions of themselves, specifically in relation to the perceived views or expectations of 'others'. There may come a time when an individual with a hidden disability forming their identity will have to reinforce their own identity.

However, not all people with dyslexia see it or experience it as a detrimental feature of their identity. One reason for not informing other people of their condition may be a suspicion that their ability differs from society's expectations of the ability of a person with dyslexia. In some cases, the static interpretation of dyslexia may bear little resemblance to those qualities possessed by an individual with dyslexia which may surpass prescribed notions of the condition.

Therefore, some people with dyslexia may try to 'hide' their condition because of society's misinterpretation of what differences people with dyslexia should exhibit   Thus, having a condition with 'hidden' or invisible signifiers of difference may influence an individual's understanding of themselves with dyslexia. In this case, the significance of this line of reasoning needs some discussion

The 'visibility' or 'invisibility of 'difference' and the influence on the identity of individuals with dyslexia

Signifiers are salient identifiable markers which often refer to physical references of biological difference Therefore, the presence of a wheelchair or a visible body deformity would inform the population of a disabling condition. The wheelchair as signification is frequently used in social settings to refer to facilities which are accessible to disabled people However, a disabling condition which is visible often overpowers all other descriptors and causes perceptions of the individual to be determined through discourses of disability. An example of this is seen in Camilleri's (1999) story in which he describes how even though he tries to hide or mask his condition, he finds that society always relates his ability to their discernment of discourses of disability

It would seem that a visible signifier reinforces certain social expectations to such an extent that many would be unable to form an impression of an individual exclusive of any reference to 'difference'. Hunt (1966 12) states' *'those we meet cannot fail to notice our disablement.. and be revolted by it'*. That is to say, the disabling condition is seen as a physical difference which shows itself to 'others' as a tangible distinction in which 'difference' is perceived

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as unfavourable. That 'others' also include people who have the term 'difference' set against them is also relevant. As Camilleri (1999:845) states:

> *Throughout my formative years and into most of my adult life I was schooled to categorise myself, to develop an image of myself, as a person severely lacking in many basic characteristics...by the everyday, negative responses of individuals in all walks of life, to see myself as somehow 'lesser' than anyone non-disabled.*

This is nothing new; Becker discovered that individuals who had undergone major life changes and become terminally ill or disabled compared their abilities or discordant bodily functions to their capabilities before the onset of their ailments. They often embodied a divergence from 'normality' as a part of their identity, expressing their individuality *'in terms of difference rather than normalcy'* (Becker 1999:16).

Camilleri (1999) equates his 'disability' with a social signifier by which others judge him and his ability as a comparison to normalcy. Therefore, the power presented within the label was increased through the visible signifier making it almost impossible to remove or sway the power structures associated with the social recognition of disability. Camilleri states that the constant 'negative' reactions of others have often affected his sense of self-worth. He states that at times he has felt ashamed, guilty, humiliated and worthless to be seen as 'disabled'.

This implies that those with hidden descriptors might not encounter stigma and discrimination. However, feelings associated with 'worthlessness' are often perceived as stigmatisation to those with hidden conditions as well as those with visible conditions. The identification and labelling of 'disabled' contains a form of 'stigma' which usually forces a person described in this way to deal with the oppressive and often stereotypical attitudes generated (Wendell 1996).

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This social interpretation of people labelled or stigmatised through the 'disabled' label is, at times, so influential that it can have an impact on an individual's self confidence or self-worth (Burden and Burnett 2005) As I have discussed, the diagnosis of dyslexia has been found to affect the self-confidence of some children However, Burden and Burnett (2005·2) argue that low self-esteem can influence the confidence of adults as well They state·

> *There is an increasing body of evidence to show that children with difficulties of a dyslexic nature are at particular risk of developing distorted or damaged self-concept... [and] unless steps are taken to enable the dyslexic child to understand and deal with their difficulties in a holistic manner...it will become increasingly difficult to overcome the detrimental effects of a negative self-image, not just in school but in later life as well.*

One argument suggests that this lack of confidence is not simply due to detrimental experiences but could also be due to the stigma attached to a specific label or reference. Goffman (1968) in his study of stigma associates the label with a negative presentation of self and which others associate with inability or difference in comparison with 'normalcy'. Thus, labelling is usually instigated by those in power over those who are not (Swain et al 2003). Riddick (1996) found that many people with dyslexia did not inform others of their condition unless they had to, preferring to appear within discourses associated with 'normal' ability. Reasons for this could be the accreditation of 'difference' as a 'negative' or oppressive association. McLaughlin (2004) describe how respondents in their study often felt stigmatised by work colleagues who saw dyslexia as only having detrimental features

Although one might suspect that given the stigma of a visible condition having an invisible condition would be beneficial, this is not necessarily the case. Descriptors of disability without the salient markers associated with disability could evoke certain social discrepancies in identification I contend that if no

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social signifiers are present, the credibility of the condition or of the individual having a 'genuine disability' is sometimes questioned. Given the stigma associated with notions of disability, invisible difference, that is a condition which is hidden or not visible to the general populace, might be seen as a 'positive' aspect of the condition, as they would often be viewed as non-disabled. Indeed theorists, including Barnes (1999) and Oliver (1996) have argued that social expectations prompted by a visible disability are often associated with inability and 'abnormality'. This view has been discussed in relation to 'The Deaf Community', who is seen, by some, as having an invisible condition. Cocker (1996) states that some people from the Deaf community argue that because they are 'able' to express or have a language which although different from the populous is a complex and accredited form of communication they do not have an abnormality and, therefore, are not dis-abled . Once again, this view of individual abnormality presents disability within constructs of a medical model, which argues that 'individual inability' is a personal product sustained through the individual's inability to attain perceived 'normal' abilities, for example hearing (Oliver 1991). Thus, some people from the Deaf community wish to remove themselves from the disabled categorisation. However, I would argue that these perceptions of disability ignore the social model approach and through trying to disown their accreditation within this label they effectively remove themselves from the political arena and, therefore, eliminate the 'need' to research 'Deaf' issues within empowering disability research processes.

Riddick (2000) and Goffman (1968) both agree that there is a difference between a visible (that is most people can see the difference) and a hidden disability. As Goffman states:

Visibility is a crucial factor. That which can be told about an individual's social identity at all times during his daily round and by all persona he encounters therein will be of great importance to him . [and] it is through our sense of sight that the stigma of others most frequently becomes evident (Goffman 1968:65)

However, I contend that having an invisible disabling condition because of a lack of visual markers can also be problematic. Goffman (1968) argues that a visible disability is already discredited but that a hidden disability is discredited due to the potential for it to be discovered Goffman claims that the person with a hidden condition is put under the stress of having to figure when, how and in what respects a person should inform others of their 'difference' Goffman claims that one outcome to this problem is that due to the lack of visual confirmation of 'difference' others may doubt the individual's endorsement of a condition. As dyslexia is a condition which, to all intents and purposes, is hidden from view, it also has the potential to be stigmatised due to its inability to be associated within those descriptors of disability which are established through signifiers. Riddick (1996) observed that educators often resist the notion that the difficulties in achieving certain educational skills by children who are dyslexic are due to causes other than a personal inability to learn. This inability to associate the condition with specific difficulties accredited to dyslexia could be due to an inability to visualise the problems As Peer (1998 in Reid and Kirk 2001) states:

Some disabilities are easily identified but dyslexic students may look the same as any others and ..this may lead to their specific needs being overlooked.

Morris and Turnbull (2007:104) argue

Dyslexia is a hidden disability and as such often fails to attract the same levels of understanding and consequently support that other more visible disabilities demand Indeed the managing director of 'Right to Write' (a UKL-based dyslexia consultancy) cites stress amongst dyslexic workers as the prime motivator for clients seeking help

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Thus, many individuals feel they are stigmatised because of a perceived personal lack of effort or ability and this perceived failure can impact on feelings of self-esteem and stress. Morris and Turnbull (2007:104) found that 'as a hidden disability', dyslexia has the potential to be misunderstood and misjudged. Therefore, although an official diagnosis of dyslexia identifies and validates the difficulties of some individuals, social conjecture associated with the stigma attached to this label can 'have a negative impact' damaging individual progression within working practices and career chances (Morris and Turnbull 2007:97). Morris and Turnbull (2007:105) state:

> Disclosure of dyslexia to managers was often considered a more precarious option with fears of punitive action influencing this. Yet non-disclosure must by definition limit dyslexia awareness and possible support.

Consequently, having a hidden disability can bring with it some unique problems for the individual. Not least, when, where and how to disclose the condition to others.

It has also been suggested that the difficulty in visualising the condition has also impacted on the plausibility of its existence (Illingsworth 2005). Should the experience or recognition of an individual impairment not equal social expectation and awareness of a disabling identity, then society may doubt the impairment as a disabling one. The fact that most people are not able to detect dyslexia has influenced, to a certain degree, the continual lack of recognition and on occasion the non-diagnosis of some individuals. This lack of diagnosis has also been seen to have an impact on the experiences which influence an individual's understanding of themselves and their abilities.

The lack of official accreditation has arguably impacted on some individuals' perceptions of themselves to such an extent that it has had a damaging effect on their awareness of their abilities. Riddick (1996) states that many people who did not realise they had dyslexia found themselves undermined by the unofficial labels attached to their person Madriage (2007) found that this lack of diagnosis had on numerous occasions meant that individuals were talked about as 'slow,' 'stupid' or 'lazy'. These unofficial labels were considered just as stigmatising and respondents in one study stated that being referred to in such a fashion by teachers often led to bullying from other students (Riddick 2000). Madriage (2007) argues that one of the reasons for this lack of support and lack of understanding and acceptance of dyslexia has been due, to a certain extent, to the hidden aspect of the condition. The hidden aspect of the condition impacts on the difficulty of 'others' to understand the 'differences' many people with dyslexia present, which can influence the reactions of people towards people with dyslexia (Madriage 2007)

We have seen from the previous evidence that individual experience and interaction with others have often led to, feelings of low self-esteem and lack of confidence in such areas as literacy skills. Evidence implies that individuals who experience detrimental interaction within the educational system and continual criticism of their academic abilities have low self- esteem and this could further impact on their life choices Burns (1982) claimed that poor self-esteem and self-worth generated through experiences in academia can lead to general feelings of inability in this area. Burns (1982) continues by stating that the consequences for a person who experiences feelings of failure are often low academic achievement and low self-worth

Consequently, this is problematic for many people with dyslexia. The very act of gaining qualifications often necessitates the need to pass the relevant criteria in place which involves written and examination processes. Thus, if an individual has difficulty or fails to attain the relevant qualifications the notion arises that they are not intelligent enough to attain the relevant standard. Thus, it becomes more than necessary to explore the links between intellect and academic skills and the performance of people with dyslexia. This poses the question, how then do individuals inform their sense of identity as people with dyslexia in view of social perceptions and personal experiences which classify them as different from the 'norm', both in ability and levels of achievement? The interesting point here is that the language used to categorize dyslexia and those people associated with it is representative of 'official' definitions including legal, disabled and educational Acts and definitions. Language is also representative within less formal text. It is also found within media representations of dyslexia.

Fowler (1991:2) claims that society's representations often 'transform,' if somewhat unconsciously, into assumptions and beliefs. An example of this is seen in Miller's (1993) study of the reportage of conflict in Northern Ireland. He found that many people had assimilated incorrect facts about singular instances which had been manipulated by Government propaganda and disseminated through media outlets to justify armed intervention. The study found that facts were disseminated by some and relayed to others as true. As media also presents value judgements through the way it interprets and discusses such issues, I propose the power structures which pervade the language used to refer to people with dyslexia within such a medium also need some exploration.

Discursive practices within media portrayals of 'dyslexia', with particular reference to dyslexia as a disabling condition

Public awareness of a label or descriptor and popular meaning associated with a term or reference is often presented within public domains Pollak (2005) found that some individuals with dyslexia in his study recognised their differences within media outlets. Although he states that his respondents did not mention seeing information on the World Wide Web or other reading materials he does highlight how *'some mature students   had seen items [about dyslexia] in the press'* (Pollak 2005:58). Thus, Pollak claims that the media had been used as a reference or a tool by which some respondents had identified their abilities or differences as dyslexic   Pollak (2005) found that some of his respondents had read articles highlighting possible features of dyslexia which they were pleased about as they recognised difficulties akin to their own experiences   Pollak highlights the fact that the incidence of respondents reporting items seen about dyslexia in the press could be due to an increased reporting of dyslexic issues at times, such as the conscious promotion of the founding of the British Dyslexia Association in 1972

According to Eldridge, (1993) media does not simply inform the reader but can also be seen as a conduit through which information can be reiterated to those outside its access base. Thus, media is more than simply a tool with which to impart information to a number of audiences· its representations can be far reaching   Therefore, the language and the social context in which issues are presented are significant and can influence perceptions of dyslexia and those described as dyslexic. Language promotes power structures and the values associated with such terms as dyslexia. These descriptors are the 'values'

correlated within both the language used and the social context in which they are being discussed. In some sense we could describe this as intertextuality: that is the relationship between two texts as producing persuasion or rhetoric, as *'rhetoric is the form that discourse takes when it goes public'* (Simon 1989). Thus, it is not 'pure' information, but is within the 'realm of judgment rather than certainty' (Simon 1989:3).

However, Elliott (2001:143) argues that whilst the effects of 'globalization and new communication technologies' can influence self-identity and social values to an extent, the effects are random and sometimes non-existent. However, Elliott (2001) agrees with Baudrillard's theory that the mass popular culture and consumerism of 'marketed lifestyles' witnessed in media outlets can have a 'debilitating effect upon individuals' at times. Elliott (2001) also asserts that the media's depiction of world events can motivate the individual's association with the theme presented. One example is media reportage of Bob Geldof's effort to inspire a worldwide response to his Live Aid[6] appeal. The response was massive. Ott (1997) also predicted that media could be a useful tool in raising awareness of dyslexia and dyslexic issues.

However, such efforts have not always been viewed as beneficial by people with dyslexia. One example of adverse reporting of dyslexic issues is found in

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[6] **Live Aid** was a multi-venue rock music concert held on July 13, 1985. The event was organised by Bob Geldof, Midge Ure, Harvey Goldsmith and the Band Aid Trust, in order to raise funds for famine relief in Ethiopia. Billed as a "global jukebox", the main sites for the event were Wembley Stadium, London, attended by 72,000 people, and JFK Stadium, Philadelphia, attended by about 90,000 people, with some acts performing at other venues such as Sydney and Moscow. It was one of the largest scale satellite link-ups and TV broadcasts of all time -- an estimated 1.5 billion viewers in 100 countries watched the live broadcast. The resulting funds reached £150 million.

Norwich et al's (2005 156) findings Their respondents claimed that the media presented dyslexia within stereotypical constructs as a '*spelling problem, which was perpetuated by the media, exploited by comedians...and which could be particularly unhelpful*' to social perceptions, 'ideas' and 'beliefs' about people's ability within this condition Thus, dyslexia is conceptualised within language that is readily accepted by its users but which fails to engage with the dyslexic condition. This language refers to dyslexia but is incapable of representing it Barnes (1992a) states that disability is often stereotyped through media to infer specific meanings and representations of inability and difference Simon (1989) would argue that rhetoric can be used to explore how individuals are motivated or affected enabling it to resolve the conflict arising when language misrepresents that which it seeks to explicate (Simon 1989 9) As Booth (1974) states, rhetoric is the '*art of discovering good reasons, finding what men believe they ought to believe*' (cited in Simon 1989.4).

This type of information when presented within the media is viewed by Peelo (2002) as 'infotainment' That is to say that the way in which the public is presented with media portrayals is seen as both information and entertainment. One example of 'infotainment' is seen within news reports. Newspaper articles or news reports within internet or television give the audience information which is presented in an entertaining manner. This is especially true of newspapers The aim of a storyline is to capture the audience's attention so they will want to read the contents of the piece. However, in order to do this they have to provide the information in an attractive manner. The storyline must be appealing and this often requires sensationalism so that the words used or the headlines provoke the reader's curiosity. However, sensationalizing the information can

also twist the true meaning to convey specific and often quite inaccurate information

One way in which the twisting of meanings has appeared within 'infotainment' is through the language and references used about people described as different; in this instance disabled. Hafferty and Foster's (1994:189) exploration of media portrayals of disabled people in the US ascertained that *'the current portrayal of physical impairment remains dominated by stereotypical renditions and simplistic characters'*. They argue that the media's representations of specific impairments portray a distorted understanding of the *'lived reality of disabilities and handicaps'*. Barnes (1992a:13) concurs with this finding stating that media representations of disabled people as *'disabling stereotypes which medicalise, patronise, criminalise and dehumanise disabled people abound in books, films, on television and in the press'*.

Barnes (1992a) also found that dominant media presentations of disabled people in Britain were often located within 'stereotypical' constructions of abnormality which impacted on social expectations manifest within discourses of disability. It can be argued that the media, through its depictions of the world and individuals within it, is a powerful medium in which to explore social structures, settings and ideologies. Representations of gender also constitute prescriptions of disability[7]. Barnes (1992a) remarks that media can often provoke different social reactions towards disabled men than for disabled women, often portraying men as heroes bravely overcoming their disability to achieve certain goals, and women as tragic heroines or pathetic victims of their condition. As Eldridge et al (1997:164) state:

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[7] Please see Morris 1991; Barnes 1992

> *The influence of any particular message will therefore relate to its 'social currency' the value of a particular item of information or a specific story in a social context and people's willingness to reiterate what they have read or seen*

Although there has been much debate about the influence media has on an individual's understanding of the world (Eldridge 1993), researchers have acknowledged that media representations of society are influential in the formation of 'ideas' and 'beliefs' about society and the individuals which inhabit it (Fowler 1991, Norwich et al 2005, Dale and Taylor 2001). It has been argued that media not only informs the population but that audiences,

> *Interpret [ideas] in light of their existing social and individual schemata, rejecting some, reorganising others and readily accepting those which reinforce their existing world view. For these reasons, it is important to understand the way in which the media construe disability, because this will have an important effect on the creation of wider cultural understandings (Sweeney and Riddell 2003:146).*

Thus, media should not be seen as a realistic representation of a specific objectivity Fowler (1991) argued that media as a socially constructed entity does not reflect any intrinsic importance within an event or any 'truthfulness', but is representative of information as *'newsworthy'* (Fowler 1991 2).

An example of social values within media representations of dyslexia is witnessed within a TV programme in 1992 which identified a high proportion of inmates in English prisons who were unrecognised or undiagnosed as having dyslexia (The Public Eye 1992) The programme claimed that out of 150 prisoners from one prison over 52% were found to have dyslexic tendencies The TV programme *Public Eye* (1992) interviewed some of the inmates on their reasons for their behaviour and found that many of the prisoners felt their

problems were due, in part, to poor teaching skills. They stated that humiliating experiences with unsympathetic or ignorant teaching staff often led to frustration. The programme suggested that there was a higher correlation between pupils who truanted and those who resorted to deviant behaviour such as stealing, than pupils who did not truant. However, research into the correlations between dyslexia and antisocial behaviour is not definitive. Reid and Kirk (2001:120) state:

> *The relationship between dyslexia and anti-social or criminal behaviour is arguably one of the most controversial in the field of dyslexia.*

Kirk and Reid (2001) state that the concerns around this type of programme are that the presumed links between antisocial or criminal behaviour and dyslexia could be interpreted as predispositions for people with dyslexia. This is significant because although the ratio of people with dyslexia to non-dyslexic people in British contemporary society, according to the British Dyslexia Association (2006), is approximately one in every ten or 10% of the population (Tresman 2006), Reid and Kirk (2001) found that there was a higher percentage of offenders with learning difficulties or dyslexia than the 10% claimed in research. These figures could then lend themselves to the argument that there is a correlation between people with dyslexia and criminal behaviour. However, this representation could be misleading. As Kirk and Reid (2001) reveal, although up to 50% of the British prison population appear to have some form of dyslexia, they argue that the correlation between the high levels of offenders in the prison system and dyslexia is more likely to be due to an individual response to the low levels of self-esteem induced through poor teaching environments than the likelihood that dyslexia itself induces antisocial tendencies and they suggest that many offenders with this condition often have

a poor or low self-conception of themselves and their abilities (Kirk and Reid 2001)

Evidence to support such arguments was suggested through the same media programme which found that some American states offered youth offenders, who were found to have dyslexic tendencies, the opportunity to attend literacy sessions rather than a criminal sentence The programme claimed that without the sessions over two thirds of offenders reoffended. However, with the onset of taught literacy sessions, over two thirds of those attending these sessions did not reoffend. The reason for this decrease was related to an increase in literacy skills which had an impact on levels of self-confidence and self-esteem.

This evidence, whilst not conclusive, suggests that a correlation between dyslexia and antisocial behaviour is spurious. It does suggest, however, that anti-social behaviour is the result of a lack of support and that if proper support is not given or accessed by the individual, antisocial behaviour might be the outcome. This, then, suggests that people with dyslexia do not have a dominant leaning to deviant career paths (Kirk and Reid 2001).

Miles and Varma (1995) concur with the claim that few people who are dyslexic are drawn down the antisocial route Whether they have been diagnosed with dyslexia as a child or as an adult and in spite of struggling with detrimental experiences through their schooling years and beyond, many will prefer to advance into employment Nevertheless, perceptions of ability or any lack of it will apply in their pursuit of career choices. This, then, demonstrates how power is not only impregnated through official representations or classifications but that public domains are also reinforcing certain discourses of dyslexia However, in spite of pressure from public representations of dyslexia that view

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the condition as 'unbeneficial' or a disadvantageous condition to have, this is not the view of all people who perceive themselves as having this condition. You could say that in an attempt to appear 'newsworthy' media portrayals of dyslexia have presented people with dyslexia detrimentally.   Thus, media descriptions could also affect the way people labelled as dyslexic are viewed in society.

The official label of dyslexia as an empowering descriptor:

The consideration of dyslexia as an advantage to the individual has not been researched; yet there are various mentions of dyslexia benefiting the individual. Morris and Turnbull (2007) found that although 79% of respondents in their study of nurses felt their dyslexia had hindered their career progression, over 90% referred to some positive aspects of having dyslexia and over 11% said having dyslexia was an asset. This is also seen in more anecdotal evidence. Zinovieff (cited in Gilory and Miles 1996:221) states that *'the important thing to remember is that there are benefits that stem from having dyslexia'*. He explains:

> *I might read more slowly than non-dyslexic students, but I also read more efficiently...I think that many dyslexics are good at lateral thinking, whereas the majority of people tend to think linearly...this rush of associated ideas can result in confused and disorganized work...with structure [these] ideas can be harnessed to create original answers to old questions.*

Having the dyslexic label has also been viewed in certain respects as an asset. Riddick (2000) argues that being viewed or identified as 'different' without an official label can also influence the experiences and at times the identity of an

individual. Riddick states that not having an official label of dyslexia can be more detrimental to some people. She describes how children who were not officially labelled dyslexic were often stigmatised through unofficial labels including 'lazy' or 'slow' She found that these alternative labels were often more detrimental and stigmatising than having the official dyslexic label attached to a person As Riddick (2000:659) states,

The [dyslexic] label is seen as conveying a positive message in preventing negative attributions of carelessness or laziness. It was similarly felt by many of the children and students that having the label dyslexia countered the more general negative attribution that they were slow or stupid and they were therefore positive about the label at both private and a public level of usage.

She goes on to argue that many of the children and parents found relief when their child was officially diagnosed or labelled as dyslexic Riddick (2000) states that this is the opposite expectation to Goffman's (1968) argument that a label signifies difference, and difference as an abnormality requires a cure It is interesting to see that not only did the parents and children with dyslexia not see this attachment of the label as a negative term they found solace or 'relief' in having the label According to Riddick, not having a label attributed to their ability or difference was more detrimental to some of the children's sense of self-worth than being labelled. An example of integration of power/knowledge constructs is discussed within Dale and Taylor's (2001) study in which power relations between the tutor and the dyslexic learner emerge as an interaction. An open dialogue between the two groups appeared through which both teachers and learners were able to learn. Ownership of learning alters power relationships within the classroom environment and enables dyslexic learners to empower themselves and to learn in their own style and at their own pace.

This then is the first issue: what if individuals are perceived as not having the relevant measures of difference to warrant the term 'dyslexia' being attached to their person? As shown in Riddick's account this inability to view many people's difference as dyslexia does influence the experiences and reactions of others which can also be detrimental to a person's sense of self. However, this does not mean that having the dyslexic label, a static description, is a positive move either. Despite Riddick's claims that many children and parents in her study found the identification of the child's difficulties as dyslexia was a positive label, this does not imply that society will view this label as beneficial. Marks (1999) argues that individuals are not passive victims of the boundaries imposed and informed through language and accommodated within labels, but language and labels can and have been used as a political tool to empower certain groups and individuals in their understanding of self (Marks 1999: Elliott 2001) as well as disempowering similar groups and individuals. Marks (1999:141) states, *the politics of language use is complex and reflects the reality that categorisations shift according to the pragmatic needs of the person speaking'*. One example of this is seen in the 'Gay' community through their empowering of the term 'Gay' to represent a political struggle to redefine the meaning of the term 'Gay' itself (Pimental-Habib 1999). Thus, the actions of the Gay community demonstrate that not all people who have labels are necessarily defined by detrimental descriptions of them.

Labels are descriptors which incorporate a socially identifiable conception of a person. Labels are, therefore, imbedded in the language used to identify them. Swain et al (2003) state that on a positive side, labels are identifiers and distinguish a person's lineage, family or group. They are 'badges of identity' which include names that we are given, or the names we give ourselves and

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have a powerful influence in shaping our understanding of 'who we are, where we come from and where we belong' (Swain et al 2003:11).

Consequently, labelling can be representative of a 'positive' individual identity The identification or label of dyslexia (through official diagnosis) can be seen as a personal benefit. An official diagnosis of dyslexia can encourage an individual to associate this now credible condition with his/her difficulty in literacy. Ott, (1997:65), (one of the few people to present the thoughts and experiences of adults with dyslexia), discusses Charlie's relief at being given the official dyslexic label Charlie states

> *These problems which I always knew I had but never found an explanation for, never thought much about them, suddenly there was a reason for them. It wasn't my fault . I felt a sense of relief actually.*

The relief which he associates with being officially dyslexic could be due to a number of reasons. These may include the value it affords the person: thus, Charlie is able to explain to others that the reason for his difference is due to a medical condition as opposed to an inability to achieve. Therefore, the identification of his problems as 'not his fault' also affords Charlie relief on a personal level His realisation that his problems are due to something out of his control can also be 'used' to inform others not to view his problems as a personal inability to learn This could imply that Charlie is empowered by the recognition and official labelling of dyslexia in that he appears to have some form of control when describing reasons for his 'differences' to others. This view further supports Riddick's argument that having the dyslexic label can be envisaged as a benefit.

Illingsworth (2005) also found that his respondents often referred to a sense of relief at the official label as it gave them a personal explanation for their

difficulties. The feeling of relief accredited to the attachment of a label is also discussed in Collett's (1997) study of people with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME). Collett (1997) states that some people expressed relief when they received the official diagnosis. It validated their inability to fulfil certain tasks by designating it a medical condition and not their own fault.

Other respondents also stated that the label was a positive step in gaining support. Morris and Turnbull (2007) also found that having an understanding of difference made respondents aware of the benefits of having the condition. Individuals in their study, whilst identifying a number of difficulties with this label, (discussed later in the chapter) commented on some of the positives of having dyslexia. Morris and Turnbull found that over 70% of respondents discussed some benefits of having the condition including determination, creativity and empathy with others (Morris and Turnbull 2007:101).

Furthermore, the accreditation of the official or 'formal' label of dyslexia has also been considered to be more beneficial than some 'informal' labels given to people. Riddick (2000) states that although the label 'dyslexia' could be viewed as a negative or detrimentally identifiable characteristic, it is better than some of the unofficial labels that some people, who have not been officially diagnosed, will be given. As previously stated these labels refer to people as 'stupid' or 'lazy'. Consequently, 'informal' labelling can be stigmatising (Riddick 2000) and, therefore, the attachment of the official 'dyslexia' label can have a beneficial impact on an individual's conception of his/her ability with this condition.

It is important not to forget that not everyone accepts dyslexia as a detrimental concept. Riddick (1996) found some people with dyslexia stated that having dyslexia had given them more and different abilities compared to those people

without the condition Dale and Taylor (2001) also stated that some people with dyslexia mentioned having extra qualities These included having a more visual approach to problem solving, having a creative or artistic quality and being able to find and develop learning and coping strategies with which to address some of the problems and issues which they encountered in everyday life (Dale and Taylor 2001). This was further evidenced in a study of nurses of which 73% stated that they were pleased they had dyslexia (Morris and Turnbull 2007).

McLaughlin also states that *'being dyslexic is not necessarily a barrier to occupational success'* (2004:180) This has been shown in the number of famous people who are described as having 'made it' with dyslexia. However, this view can have both a beneficial and detrimental influence on how people understand themselves with dyslexia. The famous people who have succeeded in spite of dyslexia may inspire other people with dyslexia to strive for things such as gaining qualifications to enhance their careers On the other hand, it could cause people not labelled to feel that dyslexia is not a serious issue and, therefore, its problems are easily overcome. However, further pressure is added if they find themselves unable to achieve their goals. In this instance, the highlighting of the achievements of other people with dyslexia could actually undermine the amount of work and effort some individuals with dyslexia sustain to achieve their goals.

However, empowerment can be achieved in various ways. Some people with dyslexia not diagnosed at school often develop a strong identity fashioned in the workplace. The source of this identity is a belief in their own ability Dale and Taylor (2001) found that this new belief in their ability could challenge the self-

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concept they developed at school in which they categorized themselves as 'thick' or 'stupid'. This belief in their ability in the workplace made them question their difficulties in certain other skills, which finally led to their *'discovery of their dyslexia'* (Dale and Taylor 2001:1003). Thus, feelings generated because of an inability to achieve in school were seen to change when the individual reflected on their accomplishments.

Conclusion

The perception and social expectation of a person with dyslexia is often interrupted or misrepresented within certain criteria which have little to do with the ability of many people who describe themselves or who are diagnosed through official channels as dyslexic. I have to reiterate that I am not suggesting that people with dyslexia do not have difficulties in some abilities. Indeed as I have highlighted in the first chapter many people with dyslexia do struggle in varying degrees in a number of areas including short term memory, organisational and phonological skills, which can affect reading and writing/spelling abilities. However, these extreme cases are the exception rather than the rule.

What I do contend is that the difficulties many people encounter are often due to social misconceptions of what dyslexia entails, including the argument that the skills of a person with dyslexia are often at odds with the social expectations of this condition.

Misrepresentations and official descriptions have often influenced not only the experiences of children and adults with this condition but have often led to

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feelings of low self-esteem and self-worth. These feelings have been demonstrated to incur depression and learned helplessness in some people. As Mead (1934) and Layder (2004) would concur, personal experiences can and often do influence identity This is further identified within the constructs of language used both in official and more public domains which often promote detrimental aspects of conditions deemed to be outside 'normal' parameters of ability.

Added to this, having a condition which many members of society would be hard pressed to perceive may reinforce feelings of doubt concerning the validity of dyslexia as a genuine condition and a disabling one. Given the detrimental experiences of some individuals with dyslexia, this has caused some individuals to hide their condition for fear of further reprisals Thus, with such social discreditation voiced through public domains such as media, and experienced personally, it is easy to appreciate how individuals with this condition are informed through such references and experiences in relation to their own abilities and their sense of self-concept or identity Such influences are not just presented within public references but also appear in how education and its establishments mould the confidence of some individuals in their abilities and influence children described as dyslexic which can further impact on their plans and choices in both Higher Education and employment.

I contend that in order to explore and consider how individuals then make sense of such references and experiences when they view themselves as having dyslexia and how societal contexts may influence their identity it necessitates an exploration of more than just how they project their thoughts on this subject. To get a flavour of their identity, an exploration is necessary into how individuals

discuss their experience and thoughts in relation to present evaluations and understandings and power structures presented in language.

Thus, I differ from or present a differing argument to Pollak's four stages of discourse. Whilst I can see the advantage of presenting students within these confines of understanding, I feel there is more to ones identity of having dyslexia than simply notions of individuals as patients, students, campaigners or intellectuals. I want to explore how individuals make sense of their experiences whilst at school, how their thought processes led them to move away from or encompass social expectations of ability or inability and how they managed such expectations in light of their own sense of self. I also want to explore how and in what ways, some individuals view their dyslexia as a benefit to their abilities. I want to understand how students have used or hidden the label of dyslexia and how some individuals with dyslexia not only see the attachment of this label as a relief but also perceive having the condition as a benefit to their ability. In order to explore how these individuals have come to their conclusions it is necessary to investigate not only what individuals have said but also how they have presented their thoughts in light of certain social representations; how having dyslexia for some is regarded as a benefit and a positive aspect of their identity, but can also be envisaged as a hindrance or an inability, and further, how individuals with an officially accredited disabling condition perceive this characteristic as a personal reference.

The question asked by this thesis is how do individuals who describe themselves as dyslexic acquire an understanding of themselves with this condition? In view of the complexity of the process, an exploration of what they say and also the underlining power constructs and social pressures which

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impose on individuals in their understanding of the words is undertaken. Thus, I purpose to explore how society, in which individuals with dyslexia are members projects and procures an understanding of this condition and its significance when associated with an individual's ability. I also intend to explore how society or more specifically the media as a public domain represents dyslexia as a condition and its inferences on the ability of those seen to have this label. I contend, then, that in order to explore private perceptions of dyslexia the question we must consider is twofold. First, in what ways can social understanding and presentation of dyslexia impact on the individual's identity with this condition? Although exploring and presenting all the social, cultural and political areas has infinite possibilities in revealing the ways and means in which they might impact on individuals, identity has been seen to be informed and influenced by a multitude of social interactions, reactions and representations

However, some social opinion, whilst not definitive, does manifest representations of dyslexia and of people with dyslexia and is seen both to inform social awareness of dyslexia and to have some impact on the social recognition of certain aspects of the condition. Thus, in order to inquire into the public domain of representations of dyslexia, I intend to use media as a barometer in which to gauge public references to dyslexic issues. In view of the discourses which prompt dyslexia to be presented as an official disabling condition and which, given the social expectation of conditions within this concept, can generate doubt surrounding its validity as a genuine disabling condition, I propose to explore how the public domain has acknowledged and discussed dyslexic issues. Because language is important as a medium in which views, descriptions and definitions are projected, I intend to use a medium in which language dominates. Thus, I will initially use media, in

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particular, given the ability of language in newspaper articles to register public perceptions of dyslexia and the difficulty society experiences in understanding that a person's difference in ability is the condition dyslexia.

Second, it is necessary to go one step further than Pollak's (2005) four representations of individual identity with dyslexia and explore how individuals relate their experience, interaction and social perception of dyslexia to informing and reforming their self-awareness as people with this condition; how individuals with this condition internalise discourses of 'difference' into a personal identity and how people who describe themselves as dyslexic have identified the term both as a social marker and as individual descriptor.

In view of the importance awarded academic achievements in Higher Education in western society and the advantages it affords in career choice, I agree with Pollak (2005) that the ways in which individuals who attend HE establishments contend with their understanding of their ability when they view themselves as dyslexic are important to explore. In light of the confusion surrounding the description of differences often seen within this condition and with the importance placed on literacy skills for career choices and life chances, I intend to explore how the sense of identity acquired by some individuals with dyslexia has enabled them to feel they have the ability to further their goals through a commitment to the challenges of Higher Education. However, I will not only explore how individuals identify with their experiences but will attempt to unravel to a certain degree how and in what ways individuals realise the benefit of dyslexia. The fact that research has tended to show the experiences of children who are described as dyslexic have often detrimentally affected self-esteem (Humphries et al 2002), self-worth (Riddick 1996; 2000) and levels of

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confidence (Humphries et al 2002), and that little research has been undertaken into how feelings of low confidence have affected these children with dyslexia in adulthood necessitates a need to explore such issues further.

Thus, the research will explore how adults attending courses in Higher Education, given the tensions which surround the condition, make sense of these tensions and apply or discredit such tensions to their understanding of their abilities In order to do this, I will also explore how their experiences in childhood, especially in their educational establishments, impinge on their ability in the present; how they made sense of their understanding of dyslexia as a disability, how they came to terms with and acted upon social expectations of themselves with this condition and how they indentify with their dyslexia in the present That is to say, in what respect they might envisage their dyslexia as both a term and label as a benefit, a hindrance or both. This will enable an exploration of how some individuals make sense of their identity with dyslexia.

The following chapter discusses the methodology which this study employed in order to undertake a discourse analysis of newspaper representations of dyslexia and of interviews with students who described themselves as having dyslexia

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

The aim of this chapter is to explain the ontological perspective and methodological approaches used to analyse the interview data and media evidence presented in this thesis. Dyslexia is a political issue and so this involves a specific focus on the power structures that operate within languages, terminologies and texts within media and in personal narratives relating to dyslexia. Therefore, this thesis focuses on the power relations that underlie the presentation of dyslexic issues, and offers as evidence a discourse analysis of media portrayals of dyslexia and interviews with people who describe themselves as dyslexic.

Discourse analysis in this context not only refers to texts within language as *'objects of inquiry'* (Wodak and Meyer 2001:2), but also explores the 'theorization *and description of both the social processes and structures which give rise to the production of a text'* (Wodak and Meyer 2001:3). In this way, the language used in media representations of dyslexic issues and the participants thoughts can be explored in relation to the ways in which social beings create meanings from social interaction through the use and understanding of language (Wodak and Meyer 2001). Furthermore, as language is produced and interpreted through dominant historical and political ideologies these are also taken into account when discussing dyslexia both as a condition and a term used to label individuals.

However, discourse analysis is a vast subject area which can include differing conceptions or meanings. Therefore, in order to understand the form that discourse analysis has taken within this research requires an explanation of meanings associated with the term. I refer to the definition of discourse analysis used by Wetherell et al (2001:7) which claims that discourse analysis is a *'field of research'* in which discourse is a form of social and cultural expression and that language is an important part of those wider processes For example, examining correlations of labelling and categorization of people in society with dyslexia reveals the values underlying the categories of dyslexia and also the *'consequences and social effects of the classification'* (Wetherell et al 2001·7).

The first two chapters discussed how dyslexia has been frequently determined and defined within socially specific structures as a medical and educational anomy and linked and defined within certain political, educational and medical structures as a 'disabling' condition, predominantly portrayed as a difficulty with reading and writing. Thus, in order to present a methodology in which these criteria have been fully addressed I feel it relevant to present an overview of the complexity within which disabled conditions are often presented within research processes and how such arguments could affect the power structures around the term 'disabled' and those conditions allied to this term, in this instance I refer to dyslexia

I contend that exploring personal and media expressions of dyslexia within discourse analysis will offer an explanation for the complexity of the social/individual constructions of dyslexia located within public representations and individual identity

To gain an appreciation of both public and private perceptions of dyslexia, and how this might influence the identity of a person with dyslexia, I employed a research strategy embedded in qualitative methods. Qualitative methodologies are concerned not just with describing **what** is going on but with interpreting and explaining **why** this might be so. I undertook this method with differing focuses. The first stage consisted of a discourse analysis of newspaper coverage of dyslexic issues. A dataset of 426 newspaper articles taken over an eight year period were analysed. The time period and range of newspapers were chosen in the anticipation that they would provide a wide selection of the topics, terminology and language used to convey dyslexic issues.

The discourse analysis of media portrayals of dyslexia was seen to provide important detail about public awareness of dyslexic issues. Furthermore, it was anticipated that it might also highlight specific issues or ways of identifying certain understandings of dyslexia which might be related to or identified within the discussion with the interviewees.

The second stage of my research entailed 14 semi-structured in-depth interviews with people who had been officially diagnosed or had diagnosed themselves (without official endorsement) as dyslexic. Interviews focused on their thoughts and experiences of living with this condition. However, because people with dyslexia have often experienced difficulty in learning within educational systems and often have differences in learning abilities concerning literacy skills, it was anticipated that exploring the experiences and the understanding of having dyslexia in individuals who had academic 'success

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stories', in that they had all acquired the 'rite of passage' to enter higher education to take a degree, would be informative. Given the misrepresentation that is often associated with dyslexia (as referred to in chapters 1 and 2) and the requirement of individuals to attend educational establishments to further many career choices, this effort to further social understanding of the construction of identity when individuals are labelled as dyslexic is, therefore, vital. Thus, the 14 participants were all students, and attended one of three universities within Devon. I argue that engaging in this small sample has allowed for a more in-depth, rich and subtle account of individual perception and awareness of living with and describing dyslexia. This two-levelled approach in the public and private sphere not only allowed an understanding of representations of dyslexia but also demonstrated how people with dyslexia react to such representations

I have argued that dyslexia has been categorized and classified within some contemporary western organisational, political and social structures under the specific classification of 'disability' (WHO 2007). Classification can be seen as a form of selection informed through cultural, organisational, political and social structures often reinforced through research. Consequently implications for the research processes, which, arguably, impact on 'disabled people', are also implicated within research studies surrounding people with dyslexia Therefore, understanding the issues arising from researching disabled people could be instrumental when researching people with dyslexia. This chapter, then, will also explore the concerns and issues which surround researching a classification of people deemed to be within an oppressed group namely disabled, and their impact on research processes.

My central research question is 'how do individuals who describe themselves as having dyslexia, identify with their condition in view of the tensions which surround dyslexic issues?' Thus, an analysis of both private and social representations will present some of the social inferences associated with this term through an understanding of the social awareness of the condition and how this awareness informs the interactions and the experiences of people described as dyslexic within society. However, a complex methodological approach such as this one demands explanation is given to the analytical theories in which this research is embedded. Thus, an account of the discourse analysis used within this process is necessary at this juncture.

Discourse analysis and its reference to dyslexic issues

As I have argued previously, the 'notion' of 'dyslexia' is complex, and dominant discourses of disability and dyslexia presented through social structures including language, beliefs, policy-making decisions, media and institutions are not static, but are open to change and 'reinvention' (Watson 2003:35). These dominant discourses, which are also present within researching processes of dyslexia, can also appear fluid and necessitate an exploration of a number of debates which have arisen around the dominant power structures which might impact on researching dyslexia. These include discourses of 'disability'. As Barnes (2003) states, being discerned as within the category 'disabled' often exposes individuals to social oppression and discrimination. I contend that discourses of dyslexia depend, to a certain extent, on the power structures surrounding language, policies and social structures which incorporate the meaning of the term or condition. In this instance I refer to how power structures can inform and influence 'micro' levels of understanding, experience and

reference to dyslexic issues An example is seen when some conditions, previously absent from such categories as disability (such as dyslexia), are then included within the 'disability' category over another time period. This enables a body of people labelled as dyslexic to access personally support and funding and entitles them to 'legal' support with which to fight against discrimination. However, as discussed previously, inclusion into this category also increases tensions around the 'right' to be seen as disabled and the 'right' for people with dyslexia to access this support and funding (please see chapter 1). Thus, power on a 'micro' level in a personal category is influenced under the political umbrella of the macro level of disability

The term 'disability' is also influenced by results of research. Barnes et al (2002) argue that research has often been considered as a political tool with the potential to maintain or challenge social understanding of disability issues. As Barnes et al (2002) state, disabled people are continually and routinely oppressed and discriminated against in society via social barriers that have been reinforced and given credence in mainstream research, this argument is also highlighted by other researchers including Oliver (1991); Swain et al (2004) and Thomas (2002) Barnes states that these barriers, (both structural and attitudinal) have sustained an oppressive culture which impedes many disabled people when accessing facets of society[1] This oppression is further supported by dominant discourses of disability which often describe those within its remit as 'unable' or 'lacking in ability' to achieve certain 'everyday tasks'. Thus, exploring this research for its influence on social perceptions of dyslexic issues

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[1] Please see social model of disability

is also necessary. An example of this is seen in Illingworth's study which found that some employers considered that dyslexia signified y 'stupidity' or 'laziness' which has been perceived to be detrimental in employment or promotion aspects for people with dyslexia (Illingsworth 2005).

One area in which this is significant is the language used to represent meanings which surround dyslexic issues. I contend that to understand how oppression can be sustained or ignored necessitates an awareness of language within which individuals incorporate inferences and meaning. Such inferences necessitate explanations through a discourse analysis. Not only to *'comment on processes which participate in the maintenance of structures of oppression'* as stated by Widdicombe (1995:9), but also in order to further our understanding of how individuals experience and make sense of these structures of oppression in view of their understanding of themselves and their abilities.

This chapter then, through using a discourse analysis, considers a number of theoretical problems associated with 'disability research' processes alongside conventional interviewing processes and will focus on establishing an analytical framework using theoretical perspectives on the construction of disability. As already stated, dominant discursive practices have been utilised in order to highlight certain power structures which surround notions of dyslexia. Through using debates around research models and their impact on this research process and also narrative research and the discourses of power within language, (in particular the social construction of context and meaning implicit within discourses of language) processes will be defined in order to prevent power structures imposing on this research.

In order to discuss how methodological approaches can impact on research into dyslexic issues, this chapter highlights how some of the power structures which can impact on such processes have been addressed Acknowledging the implications of my own research development, including the researcher as a person with dyslexia, accountability to people with dyslexia and the research process and reflectivity will enable the research to address issues such as power structures.

Finally, the chapter explores methodological processes of data collection employed in both the media analysis and the interview analysis in this thesis These include sampling, interviews and the collection and analysis of interview and media data, with reference to ethical issues arising from the research. In this way, social representations and personal experiences can be discussed in relation to associations and interactions between a social and individual awareness of dyslexia.

I have focused on a discourse analysis within this research which I contend is interconnected within the text and language of the newspaper articles and the language used in the narratives To gain an understanding of the wider processes of language, I will explore references and expressions used to refer to dyslexia through a number of areas These include the contexts within which intertextuality, genre, interdiscursivity, rhetoric, and metaphor have been applied in order to give greater understanding to the research process However, in order to achieve these aims a description of the meanings of these terms needs to be given.

Intertextuality, interdiscursivity, genre, rhetoric and metaphor and its reference to dyslexic issues

Intertextuality is understood as a method of exploring how text is often interconnected and informed in reference to other texts. As Fairclough (2001) explains '*any text is explicitly or implicitly 'in dialogue with' other texts (existing or anticipated) which constitute its 'intertexts'* (Fairclough 2001:233). Thus, to take into account dialogue around dyslexic issues one must take into account the 'text' within social constructions of 'dyslexia'. That certain educational abilities and medical descriptions and dominant policies and institutions refer to and define dyslexia within the text of 'disability' reinforces the assumption that dyslexia is an 'abnormality' which is 'disabling'. The dominant discourses which inform social structures of people described as different, in that they are 'disabled', are arguably so powerful that even when impairments are perceived as different in type or description (that is that they differ in medical definition and social understanding), they are often viewed as similar in many respects because of the stigma associated with notions of 'disability' (Goffman 1968).

Goffman's (1968) definition of 'stigma' and the official definitions of dyslexia described or referred to within notions of 'abnormality' or 'inability' (DDA 1995) is further complicated when we examine how categories such as dyslexia are different to other disabled categories. Intertextuality can highlight how such complexities are made manifest. An example of this is seen through a person categorised dyslexic. Social recognition of this condition, whilst it might be acknowledged as a difference in functions, will often present impairment as disability. This then becomes labelled as abnormality through a social perception able to consider the individual as 'suffering from' a condition or

having an 'inability' which prevents achievement. In this instance abnormality is given credence by borrowing myth created in other texts That people with dyslexia may not agree with such views is often ignored. As Riddick states, (2000) people do not view their condition as 'inability' rather they often judge their ability as differing to those without dyslexia but still view themselves as able To put it another way, many people with dyslexia may resist the representation of their condition as inability, preferring to view their ability as 'different' rather than non-existent Through using discourse analysis to explore the language or terms used to describe individuals enables this research to expose aspects of discrimination or oppression which may not at first be clear. Thus, forming an understanding surrounding how individuals or public references are presented through text can expose how society may justify discrimination of difference and the 'need' for people with dyslexia to be within the disability remit.

Fairclough also explains that such *'texts are also shaped by the socially available repertoires of genres'* (Fairclough 2001:233). Genre refers to the styles which can often portray various forms of expression. For example, Peelo (2002) refers to 'infotainment' in which newspaper content is often presented in the form of entertainment and as a certain style to encourage the reader to continue to read the article. Thus, the article may highlight inferences deemed to be interesting to the reader which have little to do with the main topic area. Genres then present text and language within certain styles Highlighting the use of genres will enable the research to identify the subtleties often expressed within text which may not be initially evident. An example of this is seen in a newspaper article Neustatter, A (2002) which claimed that playing chess would

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not only help stimulate children's abilities but could also aid those with dyslexia. On the face of it the article is advocating chess as an aid to help children's abilities, yet the references to 'but also' when describing children with dyslexia infers that those with dyslexia are less able than those children not described as dyslexic. The inference, then, is suggesting that those who are dyslexic are 'suffering from' or 'struggling' with their abilities because they are dyslexic. These references then need to be explored in order to understand the subtleties and complexities which can portray oppressive or discriminatory inferences.

Discourse analysis in the form of interdiscursivity is also applicable to this research. Discourses can and do influence other discourses, which further influences social understanding, expression and reason around the topic of dyslexia. The use of discourse analysis in this study is summed up very well by Wetherell et al (2001:9) with the claim that,

> *Discourse analysis draws attention to the all-enveloping nature of discourse as a fluid, shifting medium in which meaning is created and contested.*

Language then is not primarily the receiver and communicator of information but meaning

> *Is always **located**, immersed in this medium.*

Widdecombe (1995) argues that identity is 'negotiated through talk'. In order to understand the talk we must also comprehend or develop 'sensitivity' to how the words are employed.

According to Meinhof and Smith (2000:3) intertextuality is not about the superficial observation that texts are implicated in trace form within other texts, but the interactions between texts which includes the 'producers of texts and

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their readers' *'lifeworlds'*. Thus, the language used not only signifies the meaning and identification of dyslexia, but how relevant this is in the story and how the reader may integrate this relevance into their understanding of the text Silverman states: *"Texts can constitute a starting point for qualitative analysis in their own right"* (Silverman 1997:67).

Intertextuality, Language and dyslexic issues within newspapers

Language used in newspapers is relevant in this study because representations of issues within text and language can impact on social recognition of subject areas and the individuals described within them According to Bell, researching media language data is an obvious choice as it provides *"data which is good quality, adequate quantity, comparatively easy to access and not modified by an observer effect"* (Bell 1991:9).

Curran (2002) argues that newspapers are often perceived as a source of factual information, and that newspaper articles offer more detail and description to specific topics and subjects than the news reports on the TV or radio (Curran 2002). Moreover, readers can be informed about specific issues (such as dyslexia) which may not be referred to in the headline but may be present in the report Furthermore, the provision of storylines, which refer to background histories of individuals within certain Sunday newspapers, provides an in-depth dialogue in which to explore contemporary trends Bell states that Sunday newspapers are an important resource as *"Sunday papers the world over, tend to differ from dailies"* (Bell 1991:19) often presenting a more in-depth story which references historic accounts to give a fuller storyline

However, these reports are often not presented as a pure picture of accounts but are presented as a form of rhetoric. That is to say that reports are presented within persuasive expression, which when used with the word 'news' suggests a source of factual information, which in turn gives the reports credibility; unlike magazines which usually imply fictitious or unrealistic issues (Curran 2002). Newspaper reporting can manipulate language in a variety of ways to highlight meanings and understandings of issues which not only informs but can impact on the tone in which it acknowledges issues such as dyslexia. Thus, exploring the use of rhetorical language enables the research to highlight the tone of the articles used to persuade the reader to reach a certain type of understanding or meaning about dyslexic issues. Thus, an exploration of the meanings and understandings present within the language used in the text exposes discourses of power encapsulated within these representations.

Rhetoric is argued by Foucault (1966) to be implicit within discourses of power. This is discussed in two ways: first, in the use of the words and second, the context in which the report has been presented. For instance, a journalist may highlight a minor issue within an article because they deem it to have a more sensational value and only mention briefly the main topic area. Bell (1991) states that headlines and leads *are micro stories, [therefore] it is not surprising they contain a micro(i)sm of the problems of misreporting"* (pp.218). He goes on to argue that even when a story is written around the main subject, the journalist could still portray a misleading storyline by using sensational wording. Barnes states that this type of writing could be one of the mechanisms by which disabled people are portrayed in a certain discriminatory way.

> *Worldwide, people with disabilities experience invasion of the disability identity through the practices of labelling and hegemonic language usage detrimental to their images* (Peters in Corker, 1999:103).

The power inherent in the language used in media reporting is therefore worthy of exploring. Language used within media texts not only informs the public of social events, but is presented in such a way that it tells stories. Bell (1991) states that the way the story is presented enhances the newsworthiness of the text. Therefore, presenting stories within a context of damage, injury or death, conflict and deviance, are all considered as newsworthy (Bell 1991). This is important, in that highlighting dyslexic issues within such a context could have implications for the readers' understanding of both dyslexia and people described as such

Furthermore, there is an awareness of political correctness in the language used in the reporting of disabled issues because of the illegality surrounding discriminatory practices. Consequently, language such as 'cripple' and 'handicapped' are deemed inappropriate as such terminology reinstates and reinforces a *'negative self image of disabled people'* as well as perpetuating *'discriminatory attitudes and practices among the general public'* (Barnes 1992)

Recently, other terms have been viewed as more acceptable by disability activists such as 'disabled.' This term has been seen increasingly in both the textual and oral outlets of the media (Barnes 1992) However, it is felt that the replacement of words with others might still make the discrimination of disabled people a reality as the political perspective of the word 'disabled', and what it stands for, is still discriminatory *'The language has changed but not the politics behind it* (Drake 2004:101)

An example of this, cited by Drake (2004), can be seen in a newspaper article which discusses good and bad institutions. The article points out how the public should help to prevent abusive behaviour toward disabled people who live within these institutions. However, there was no mention of whether disabled people should be in an institution in the first place. This is rhetoric in that as Drake claims the context in which the language is used fuels the notion that even though the name has changed from 'handicapped' to 'disabled' the *article still implies that the group concerned need to be institutionalised'* (Drake 2004:101). In view of this argument, it is considered important to explore how dyslexia has been referenced: that is to say, the context and language which have been employed to refer to dyslexic issues.

Consequently, media coverage of disabled issues can have a powerful and often 'negative' impact on the image of a disabled person (Barnes 1992a; Corker and French 1999). Foucault argues that knowledge and power are connected and it is through these connections that language becomes informed. Therefore, language is representational of our understanding of social values and norms which are sustained through political, social and cultural structures which are upheld through *"discursive rules and themes that predominate in a particular socio-historical context"* (Prior 1997:70).

The media and its influence through rhetoric and metaphor on public perceptions of dyslexia

There has been much debate about how influential various media representations are to the individual's understanding of social values and norms (Bell 1996:84). Bell (1996) has voiced concerns that people soak up media representations like a sponge allowing these interpretations to affect their own

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understanding of society And Macdonald (2003:1) states, *"media still figure strongly as narrative-makers, capable of influencing public perceptions of a 'reality' beyond their borders"*

Other perspectives perceive people as able to discern what is 'information' and what is 'sensational' media representations, concluding that the public are not influenced by the media's presentation of storylines. My own argument is based on the view that this dualism is too simplistic. I contend that, although people are informed by media output they also have other social, cultural and political arenas in which to make sense of media stories (Bell 1996). Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that the language used in discursive formations by the media can and does assist in constructing specific frameworks of believing (Macdonald 2003).The Glasgow media group(in Eldridge et al 1997.160) stated

> *All these are variations in audience 'readings' of media reports, there are pervasive common themes in the meaning conveyed to the public.*

They continue to argue that although people may 'resist' such powerful messages through the media, it may still have the force to express facts and manipulate their ideas, beliefs and attitudes (Eldridge et al 1997).

Thus, studying language and text evident in media outputs provides us with important information when evaluating how society portrays dyslexia. In this way, we can appreciate how certain discourses of dyslexia formulate the construction of identity of people who are dyslexic That there has been little or no research around how the media has shaped perceptions of dyslexia confirms research in this area is, therefore, long overdue. Thus, the media analysis presented in this thesis provides a useful backdrop to the narrative interview findings and, at the same time, fills an important gap in 'dyslexic' literature

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When exploring social and individual understandings of the world in which we live, we could refer to Durkheim's Social Individual who makes and is made by society and is formulated through certain language. Thus, it is how language uses ideologies and collective representations to define social understandings and meanings. Consequently, research is used to reinforce and draw attention to social representations which in turn is used to describe the social individual and is also reflected in the public sphere including media outlets. However, due to the lack of research into dyslexic issues in relation to media representations and the argument that people with dyslexia are defined, to a certain extent, within discourses of disability, there needs to be an exploration and research into media's representation of disabled people to further the argument surrounding the importance of media representations of dyslexic issues.

I have taken note of Shakespeare's (1996) comments that the language used in research must not impede or prevent disabled people from accessing it. Such comments are also presented within an ongoing argument that research, which only discusses or highlights the social barriers which impede disabled people when accessing social amenities, does not 'go' far enough (Oliver 1991; Barnes 1992; Walmsley 2001). The fact that much research sits on dusty shelves of academic libraries or is only discussed within academic journals, which are rarely seen or understood by the disabled public, is perceived by some to be verification that research into disability issues is not being accessed as tools for empowerment (Bury 1996). Research is considered to be a political voice with which to inform and expose power issues and structures and used to resist formations of oppression and discrimination. It is important for this

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research to ensure the study is available to the people who are being discussed

Bury (1996) argues that much academic research into disabled issues has been experienced by disabled people as a form of assault. I contend that in view of such remarks, this research must offer people with dyslexia something more than just an interesting view. Thus, to stem such criticisms this study intends to explore and highlight some of the issues which surround how language and social structures impact on the identity of dyslexia and which then might be identified as within constructs of oppression for people with dyslexia and will endeavour to make such knowledge known to wider society through the publication and presentation of relevant information for more public use (in such vicinities as institutions, dyslexia associations and so on).

Current media representations of disabled people

The media has been linked to maintaining and reinforcing socially restrictive and disabling barriers [2](British Council of Organisations of Disabled People). These include attitudes and policies that pertain to such areas as *'education, employment,[and] the benefits system'* (Barnes, 1992:203) Therefore, I consider it prudent to investigate media representations of disabled people in an attempt to explore how such constructions and presentations impact on discourses of disability and thus, dyslexia I argue that an exploration of media portrayals of disability issues necessitates a broad view of articles from media

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[2] See medical and social models of disability

outlets in order to ascertain how disabled people have been and still are projected within specific meanings and constructs as different to the 'norm'. Therefore; this chapter initially explores how media has presented disabled people within general media outputs.

Media has shifted in recent years from a social model overview to a more fragmented framework of disabled issues and its output often uses 'negative' and 'harmful' images to present disabled people (BBC - Ouch 2006:2). This argument has been seen in the change of agenda within TV and radio programmes from factual issues of disability, incorporating and focusing on the social oppression of disabled people, to a focus on individual impairment as a 'dilemma' or abnormality (Drake 2003).

Consequently, TV programmes such as 'See Hear' which emphasise 'positive' disability roles, are becoming less evident. The media are instead increasingly presenting disabled people in more 'needy' or 'abnormal' roles (Barnes 1992). An example of this is 'Children in Need', (Morris 1991) which reports on the 'plight' of disabled children in an attempt to present disabled people as victims and to make the audience pity their predicament in order to obtain funds (Morris 1991).

There is also an increase in the number of specialist reports on specific disabilities: examples include one off articles such as 'Teenage Tourette's Camp' (ITV1 2006) or 'It's Not Easy Being a Wolf Boy' (channel Five 2006). These programmes offer a form of 'freak' show agenda for their audience. Shakespeare (1999) argues that such programmes expose disability issues as a type of 'circus voyeurism' in which individuals are often depicted as the

'freaks' offered to the audience as entertainment. This could be the case with stories about dyslexia which could also be presented as entertainment. This would involve individuals achieving certain goals through 'overcoming' their dyslexia.

That TV and radio programmes are often reported and discussed within newspaper articles and internet discussion sites suggests that the presentation and meaning attached to these programmes are not confined to individual mediums One example of the link between media outputs is seen in a discussion surrounding a TV programme which referred to doubt surrounding the right for dyslexia to be classified as a disability or 'genuine' medical phenomena The programme was titled 'the dyslexic myth' (Dispatches 2005). The controversy within the programme's agenda instigated comment and debate within a number of daily newspapers including The Guardian (2005), The Daily Telegraph (2005); and The Daily Mail (2005) The programme editors also presented a discussion portal on the internet after the airing in order to continue the debate and made the script of the programme available after the show. Thus, projections of media representations can be reflected within other media outlets This demonstrates how Intertextuality has been used to keep the storyline going but only highlighting the subject area in this case, 'dyslexia a myth or a genuine condition?'.

Shakespeare (1999) in his study of projections of disabled people within modes of media outputs found that disabled people are often delineated in specific roles or characters He found that disabled people are described within films, books and storylines as a certain character These depictions include the

'supercrip' such as Helen Keller; the 'tragic but brave' victim, such as Tiny Tim; and the 'sinister' cripple such as Dr No.

Research into newspaper coverage of disabled issues also unearths constructs of disability and thus disabled people within 'negative' and oppressive projections of 'inability' or lack of ability. Auslander and Gold (1999:420) state:

> *The press has an important role in reflecting and shaping public attitudes. In many ways media coverage reinforces negative attitudes towards people with disabilities, particularly those with psychiatric and developmental disabilities.*

Furthermore, media has promoted a stereotypical ideology of disability through terminology used in its discussion and understanding of disabled people. Barnes (1992a) states that most *"reports about disabled people in TV programmes and documentaries are about medical treatments and impairment-related cures"* (Barnes 1992a). This constant reinforcing of the medical approach towards disabled people and the continual reference to medical treatment serves to divert attention away from the concept of a society whose prejudices are due to discriminatory practices and values (Barnes 1992). Effectively, this replaces societal accountability with the notion that disabled people, which includes people who are dyslexic, are unable to participate in society due to their impairment or condition.

Barnes also found that disability issues are continually segregated into charitable, political or medical problems (in Swain et al 2004), and with dyslexia officially defined as a disability, the indication is that references to dyslexic issues might also appear within such segregated themes.

However, not all representations of disabled people focus on oppressive or detrimental issues such as abnormality or individual impairment. 'Ouch' a radio 4 programme, found less oppressive structure for the portrayal of disabled people However, Barnes (1992) stated that these programmes are few in comparison to the continual portrayals of disability as 'abnormal'. This research reinforces the argument that a majority of media representations of disability issues are highly biased and promote 'negative' and often detrimental attitudes or references towards disabled people as a community and a lack of respect for individual difference

In the case of individual disabilities research has explored certain areas including HIV (Eldridge 1993), The Deaf community (Cocker 1996) and mental health differences which also experience bias and negative representation However, little has been discussed around media portrayals of dyslexia Therefore, the impact and implications of media as a conduit or source used by the public to gain information on dyslexic issues or people living with dyslexia necessitate further exploration. This includes the internet as a source of information.

The complexity of researching disability issues within the Internet

The Internet has been increasingly seen as a popular source of information in recent years with Government statistics stating that 84% of UK households have internet access (National Statistics online 8 January 2008) Schneider et al (2004.114) state *"the web has emerged as a distinct media form in the past 10 years* However, some researchers also present various problems with researching internet issues (Schneider et al 2004).

It has been argued that the internet has many drawbacks (Schneider et al 2004). Due to the vast and infinite variety of topics within an unlimited amount of web pages, quality of representation could be compromised (Schneider et al 2004:114). Thus, using link words or subject areas to gain access to information on specific subject areas, such as dyslexia, could produce indeterminate results, which might not be relevant to the specific subject area. Furthermore, the 'vastness' of the internet, with its links to other web pages and inferences which deviate from the subject area, may make individuals lose their 'way' or incur an information 'overload' (Pauwels 2005). Furthermore, most items on the web are in a constant state of flux, *"for what's there today may be gone tomorrow without leaving a trace"* (Pauwels 2005:606). This would imply that the information on the web could change or disappear at any given time. Thus, exploring language in relation to context and 'text' in dyslexic issues is also libel to emerge as infinite, changeable and vague.

In a study of populations accessing online material verses newspapers, it was concluded that people will often only view a topic/subject on the internet if it is of particular interest to them, whereas printed newspapers are 'constructed to guide their audience through the offer as a whole' (Schoenbach et al 2005:247). Therefore, the reader is often presented with various topics and issues, which, although unattached to the specific storyline, still denote specific notions of value about those subjects. In view of this, I contend that a discussion of 'text' presented within newspaper print is relevant at this time.

Consequently, a deeper understanding of language in the media requires an acknowledgement of how words such as disabled or dyslexic are represented.

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That is to say, in what manner have the words become involved within the premise of the storyline? To enable this research to apply to my theoretical construct necessitates an exploration of certain questions including. how is the terminology used to portray dyslexia representative of specific rules and norms and in what ways could such representations impact on the understanding of dyslexia and people with dyslexia? Such rules and themes are also used to empower and disempower individuals and groups. Foucault (in Prior 1997 70) argues that these representations carry with them powers which enable certain agents to speak with authority, and so *"to authoritatively pronounce on the shape and form of the world"* (Prior 1997·70) Thus, understanding how the text and the references to dyslexia were employed within the media is considered important

In exploring all the references of media outlets and in view of the importance in accessing and discussing the language, text and context of dyslexia, it was considered that newspaper articles would be the most valuable source.

Because of the continual cross referencing of stories, items and subject areas within media outlets, it was considered that such references and storylines would not be solely presented within this medium alone. Furthermore, because of the archiving of the text from newspapers in date order, this study would be able to employ a longitudinal study around the differences in the language, text and subject areas in which dyslexia appears throughout a number of years.

This enabled access to a large dataset in which portrayals of dyslexic issues within British newspaper coverage were often referred to For example, over

the past eight years there have been over 4800 articles which referred to dyslexia or dyslexic issues within British National newspapers.

It can be argued that as power is inextricably linked with knowledge (Foucault (1993) and if the representation of that knowledge is understood through language, then one's identity labelled as dyslexic must be influenced by the continual reference to and belief in what that terminology represents. Thus, language in newspaper articles and the internet has the potential to influence perceptions of not only the condition, but also the people with dyslexia who have been shaped by such representations. Therefore, I have explored the framework which surrounds language meanings to show how dyslexia has been represented in national newspaper articles over a set period. I will discuss the qualitative methods used to obtain the newspaper articles at a later stage. First I explore how methodological processes may influence research.

Using Methodological Processes to Address Empowering Research

The location of relevant text in newspapers requires an awareness of the likelihood of its presence being incidental to a primary theme. As dyslexia is located within disability, the debates which surround this category also have implications for those people described as dyslexic. Thus, interdiscursivity enables the thesis to explore the power issues and inequalities which may impact on not only the research but also the research processes and how research may also affect social representations of dyslexia and individuals described as such.

As I have argued, research has the potential to reinforce stereotypical representations of disabled people. Barnes (2003 4) states that even though research into disability issues has been around for *'much of the last century'* nearly all of these enquiries

> *Were, and in many cases still are, being produced in one way or another rooted in conventional wisdom, namely, that accredited impairment, whether physical, sensory or intellectual, is the primary cause of 'disability' and therefore the difficulties economic, political and cultural, encountered by people labelled 'disabled' (Barnes 2003:4).*

Furthermore, methodologies within the research process to address these discriminatory practices are often not perceived as simplistic processes Thomas states:

> *Issues surrounding disabled research whilst apparently straightforward (whose side are you on?) are thus in practice, complex and difficult to resolve (*Thomas 1999.155).

To enable research to empower disabled people it must include certain criteria, such as *'breaking down the traditional hierarchy and build[ing] researcher accountability to disabled participants'* (Mercer 2002.238). Mercer also argues that to avoid potentially discriminatory values becoming attached throughout the research process, researchers should employ specific disability theories or models within their design and application. However, disability researchers offer no clear consensus concerning the relevant methodological approach which would best suit in the pursuit of such aims

However, after an exploration of several models of disability research which profess to be inclusive, empowering and to benefit disabled people including critical action research, participatory action research (Zarb 1997, HEALY, K 2001), emancipatory research (Barnes 2003; Walmsley 2001, Thomas 1999),

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and inclusive learning research, I concluded that no one model was applicable for this piece of research. Thus, I propose to explore how using sections of the models mentioned would be more beneficial to this study and to give my reasons for this course of action.

However, I believe presenting methodological approaches within research processes can be challenging. Issues involved with the validation of research methodologies depend, to a great extent, on the researcher's understanding of the application of these theories. This is further impacted by the acceptance of such applications within some power structures. This refers to the hierarchical power structures which produce and sustain ways of understanding the social world. Shakespeare (1999) claims that care must be taken when applying research theories in case they become corrupted by preconceived ideas present in society and then easily rejected by the very political organisations we wish to amend. He continues:

> *There is little point in developing progressive research which is rejected out of hand by government and media alike as being contaminated by ideological prejudice* (Shakespeare 1996:118).

Therefore, the question is how do we undertake research which informs social understanding of dyslexic issues and also apply the empowering processes which will meet both 'disability' research criteria for empowerment and the power structures which it may wish to expose. Whilst I applaud Atkinson's (2004:691) argument that inclusive learning research *"has the potential to be empowering for the people who are involved in it"* and that empowerment is gained through knowledge and understanding of

> *Oral and life history methods and [that such] outcomes are seen as ways in which people [with learning difficulties] can come to own and control the stories of their lives* (Atkinson 2004:691)

I question how inclusive my participants could be in this study. As I am presenting the subject and even with semi-structured interview techniques still having a large influence on the subject areas, I felt that although the participant may gain some level of power within the process, in my opinion it did not give a level of autonomy proclaimed by Atkinson.

Consequently, I felt the problems of inclusivity and empowerment could be better addressed through emancipatory research processes Humphries (2000:184) acknowledges that emancipatory *'traditional research is deeply implicated in power'* and contends that research should not just respond to empowering the researched voice through the outcomes but should also empower the researched throughout the research process. However, in view of my research criteria, this is also not a simplistic task. The reference to power issues can cause the research to become empowering to the researched I argue that empowering necessitates not just a requirement to highlight the power relations within the research process, but also an exploration of the limitations on the applicability of such empowering processes within the reality of 'doing' the research.

An example of differing focuses within emancipatory research is seen in Walmsley's (2001:188) opinion that it should enable

> *the researcher [to] move from being the 'expert' interpreter of the world to being the servant of disabled people, putting his or her skills at their disposal. Disabled people should formulate the research question and, crucially, control the funding.*

However, Zarb (1992) disagrees with Walmsley's description of emancipatory research. Although he argues that, like Walmsley, power is something which people must take for themselves, he states that reciprocity infers a mutual exchange between the researcher and the researched, rather than a master to servant status which Walmsley (2001) felt was applicable. Thus he moves the empowerment in research between the two. Mercer (2002) also conveys a cautionary note to Walmsley's research processes. He argues that to present the researcher as servant to the researched raises concerns over the translation of principles (Mercer 2002).

Thus, the ideal that research is to be truly empowering throughout, to the extent determined in Walmsley's (2001) description, is difficult to define and address. I believe that as the interpreter and instigator of this research, I project my own power relations on the research process by default, thus, by implication, my own structure and meaning

Although I agree with the arguments that researching disability issues requires development to lessen the power structures around the process, I also take into account their complexity when applied to my research practices. One example of this occurred within the formulation of the research questions for the interviews. In my study, I asked the interviewees if they had any problems with the questions (understanding the question, the applicability of the subjects chosen and the framing of the question). I also took into consideration their comments and employed a reflective process throughout the interviews both of the topics and issues which arose, allowing specific subjects and issues to inform and change the questions throughout the process.

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However, using discourse analysis enables this research to use frameworks which have been informed through the literature in the previous two chapters and to demonstrate some of the issues requiring some exploration whilst also incorporating a dialogue in which my participants can express their thoughts about the questions asked, which I then took into consideration for the topics I felt applicable to the research question. I contend that whilst I enabled the participants to have some power within the process, ultimately, I had the final say. Shakespeare argues that although models of methodologies promise to aid the understanding and eradication of oppression for disabled people, such processes have their problems (Shakespeare 1999). Although this may be considered a problem, I argue that such processes have to have some direction, but that employing such a reflective process enabled the participants to have a voice in that direction.

Shakespeare (1999) also warns that an unimaginative obligation to a set of static model themes may result in other issues being ignored This presents a quandary because to explore and represent individual experience and opinion on living with dyslexia requires a research process empowering both to the participants of the research and the dyslexic community at large However, in this study undertaking research which relies on one specific methodological approach to achieve these aims appears problematic.

Consequently, I considered Truman et al's (2000) argument that the key to research is to understand and reveal the production of knowledge. By understanding that

> *Critically informed knowledge is more 'true' or more objective than*
> *prevailing knowledge systems...[we can] uncover the hidden reality*

around which other kinds of knowledge collude in order to conceal it (Truman et al 2000:6).

That the theoretical approaches mentioned appear to include one dominating concept, that of empowering the researched people, both those involved within the research and the dyslexic 'community', it is intended to adapt the empowering processes within emancipatory approaches to my own research. Therefore, I intend to address this research process drawing on Truman's suggestion of critically informing knowledge whilst also undertaking and exposing the need to provide research processes which empower both the participants within the research and the dyslexic community. Thus, my research process will inform through exposing knowledge systems which may have a bearing on the power structures around this research process.

Thus, the methodologies incorporated within this study have been decided upon because of the arguments surrounding oppression within some forms of research processes around notions of 'disability'. Consequently, in view of the problematic nature surrounding the translation of these specific research models, I have not referred to any specific model. However, because I also agree that emancipatory research does raise a number of important issues surrounding the quality and relevancy of researching disabled people, I have drawn upon certain aspects of emancipatory methodology in an attempt to highlight issues of empowerment which I feel are relevant in this study. In order to show how such complexity in the research process has been undertaken, and in view of the differing strands of this research, I propose to investigate a detailed account of the methods and theories adhered too, enabling the dyslexic community through this research to have a voice, which, I believe, will benefit the research agenda and allow for a research environment which facilitates

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reciprocity between researcher and researched. Thus, the research will initially consider the language and the political voice which will contribute to the empowering process of the research.

Therefore, the study will also discuss the use of language as a political voice and research references which can imply or naturalise discursive formations of oppression as discussed below

This research proposes to include in this thesis a political voice to acknowledge that people within certain categories officially defined as 'disabled' (and that includes people with a 'dyslexic' label) can be influenced by social awareness and perception This is to say that social notions of disability are often perceived within 'commonly' held views that associate people who are disabled with difference. This is described as a 'negative' distinction and as such the interaction and experience of people labelled 'disabled' can also be said to be influenced by social values. As Camilleri (1999:845) states,

> *I have been influenced by educators, media images, religious instruction and especially by the everyday negative responses of individuals in all walks of life, to see myself as somehow 'lesser' then anyone non-disabled.*

And Galvin (2003)

> *To rely on an identity based on the reification of an oppressive category imposed by hegemonic discourse does not challenge the assumptions upon which it is based' (Galvin 2003:677).*

This then refers to two issues how has dyslexia been described and defined in hegemonic discourses of dyslexia and are these discourses oppressive in relation to the identity of people with dyslexia in their day-to-day lives. This argument is significant if we take into account the continual argument expressed within certain prominent institutions, that dyslexia should not be

viewed as a disability or a genuine condition. Labour M.P. Graham Stringer (2009) recently stated that dyslexia should be seen as a 'myth' and that it was a *'fictional malady invented by the "education establishment" to cover up bad teaching of reading and writing'.* That such comments occurred within a political arena reinforces the need for the study to explore how such thoughts and opinions can impact on social and individual understanding of dyslexia, both within the language used and the power issues which surround dyslexia.

Furthermore, it is argued that language used around dyslexic issues is often subtle and can influence the research in a number of ways: from the interpretation of the information received within media texts, to how society can influence the participants' interpretations of the questions. In an effort to acknowledge such subtleties, I intend to adopt a reflective process, discussed in emancipatory and participatory research approaches, and include these processes throughout this research. One example of reflection is through addressing the empowering process of the research. The research endeavours to empower both the researched community and the participants. However, it must be acknowledged that this is a personal thesis, within which my thoughts and actions will have a bearing. Therefore, it is hoped that the reflection will enable the bias to be, 'if not removed', then understood and highlighted.

Furthermore, as it has already been mentioned, this research involves two research strands, that of interviews with people who describe themselves as dyslexic and research into specific media portrayals of dyslexic issues. Due to these two strands the methodological approaches have been undertaken in slightly differing ways, depending on whether the research is discussing the

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interviews or the newspaper articles   Initially, I will discuss the interview process

Auto/biographies and their importance for the research process

I decided to inform the participants that I was also dyslexic I felt this information was valuable in a number of respects. On one level it showed a personal understanding of the subject matter   Furthermore, it has been suggested that one way to increase feelings of trust is for the researcher to be as clear and open as possible about the purposes and processes of the study however, going 'native' has been historically perceived as inadvisable, even detrimental to the detachment of the research process (Letherby 2003) Yet I contend that because researchers should acknowledge the privileged position they hold within this process and the power with which they can impact on the research, they have a duty to highlight any considerations which might impact on their thoughts around the subject; being a person with dyslexia, will undoubtedly affect my understanding of this condition What researchers should be seeking is ways in which they can benefit and not hinder the research process

The argument that research cannot be discussed, described or intelligently critiqued or analysed because of familiarity with the subject area supposes that women cannot be researched by women or men by men. As Letherby (2003.131) states· *'Involvement with respondents at whatever level is complex and is affected by the power dynamics of the research relationship.'* Therefore, it could be said that understanding power relationships means enabling the

participants to have all the relevant information, including the fact that the researcher is also dyslexic.

Furthermore, it opens up the possibility of the participants regarding the interviewer as someone living with this condition. This infers a relationship with a 'kindred spirit'. In this reference the "kindred spirit' implies a two way exchange and mutual support' (Letherby 2003:124), in that the participant is able to relate to the interviewer by discussing a topic that they both have in common.

Thus, disclosing my association with the condition might bestow a feeling of shared information which might make participants more likely to respond in kind (Mann and Stewart 2003). Having dyslexia also allows me a personal insight into the subject area, and infers that certain questions asked may reflect such insight (Miller and Glassner 1997). I also contend that having at least a basic awareness of the reality of living with this condition should afford me some measure of sensitivity, both in relation to the participants' experiences and the subject area.

However, I also contend that this kindred spirit within the interview could turn into a more friendly relationship; and whilst I agree that the relationship should be a friendly occasion, it should incorporate the interviewer as a friendly stranger and nothing more. Letherby (2003) states that the friendly stranger is beneficial to an interview enabling the participant to discuss the issues as openly as they like without fear of ostracism or of incurring blame, guilt or condemnation from the listener.

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One example of this occurred when I asked a woman if she felt any experiences in school were related to her dyslexia She stated that because she had been abused through her school years by a teacher she was unable to relate her difficulties at that time to anything other than the abuse. I felt privileged that she shared this information with me However, I did not ask her any questions apart from making sure she did not want this information removed from the interview and to inquire if she wished to pause or stop the interview. At the end of the interview I asked if she had acquired any professional support She replied that she had, and felt happy that at last she was able to talk about her experience. To make sure she was happy to leave the subject, I asked if there was anything more she wanted to discuss and then we went on with the interview process

Further, as the researcher, it would be inappropriate either to force my sense of values onto the participants, or discredit their own experiences and opinions should they appear different or opposite to my own Thus, the role of friendly stranger enabled her to feel she could discuss this experience without the inclusion of another person's thoughts and comments on the issue

Moreover, I am aware that as the researcher, I will ultimately influence the analysis of the interviews in terms of coding, selecting text, and interpreting observations from the raw data However, continually reflecting on the participants' experiences or thoughts, I contend, will enable a more complex but interesting and varied piece of work to be analysed

Empowering people with dyslexia through research processes

The incorporation of an *'empowering process'* is acknowledged throughout the research process, including *'how dominant discourses'* of dyslexia can impact on the thoughts or understanding of dyslexia by people with this condition (Barnes 2003:6). An example of this is seen when I asked the participants if they felt their dyslexia was a disabling condition. Many said they did not think or refer to their dyslexia as 'a disability'. When I asked them to define 'disability', many stated that it was a physical difficulty: as Sam said 'like not being able to get out of bed or something'.

Whilst I acknowledge what they said, I also consider it important to acknowledge that such thought processes may be influenced by social impressions of the term which can then impact on their reasons for rejecting the idea their dyslexia is disabling. I contend that such attitudes collude with certain notions of disability which imply that 'disability' refers to a personal physical difference in ability rather than a political reference in which oppression is often engaged. Thus, whilst exploring the language used in both the interviews and the media, I will also endeavour to discuss the social concepts around the issues which might impact on that language.

With this in mind, I endeavoured to discuss the research processes using the concepts of the empowering processes surrounding emancipatory approaches. Moreover, whilst I argue that these processes did allow for empowerment in certain areas, I also recognize that I encountered some limitations within them. With this in mind, the study initially explores the methodology approach taken within the interviews.

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I have taken into account that research into disability issues (or involving disabilities) has the potential to oppress Consequently, I have endeavoured to undertake the interview processes as a reflexive participant (Davis 2000). This has required certain agendas to be embedded. These included

- Not relying or reverting to one particular model agenda but choosing to take relevant aspects of differing research models and adapting them to suit this study,

- Employing clear explanations of the methodological choices made within this research process,

- Enabling the participants to have had some influence over the research process. Their questions and comments have provided ongoing feedback, which informed and changed the structuring of the interviews to a certain extent.

This thesis challenges the idea that research is unbiased and value free, and states from the onset that both researcher and participant bring into the research process their own set of understandings of 'looking at the world' (Davies 2000:193). Therefore, I acknowledge that biases do exist in this research but I have endeavoured to highlight and explain any preconceptions It is anticipated that by emphasising this awareness the research develops it own political voice (Zarb 1997). This acknowledges how individual experiences can influence one's understanding of the social world.

To this end I have described the research processes which best suited my research agenda which includes an understanding of issues around oppression

I have incorporated this into one agenda to encapsulate all these challenges. Thus the research is undertaken through an agenda of accountability to the people with dyslexia, the interviewees, and the dyslexic community as a whole. This will be expanded below.

Accountability to the interviewees and the dyslexic community

Another issue is the clarification of how and to whom is the research accountable (Barnes 2003). The disabled population is 'vast' and many people deemed by certain criteria to be disabled may not consider themselves as disabled. This is true of many people with dyslexia (Riddick 2000). However, if researchers make the research accountable to certain groups such as BCODP (British Council of Disabled People) they are able to reach a vast amount of disabled people as this organisation publishes studies under the premise of empowerment.

However, as Shakespeare (1999) states, not all studies are able to be presented in such journals and not all disabled people will read such academic literature. I argue that inclusivity is feasible if the research is made available to such organisations which might have an interest in the study. In this instance, this includes the Dyslexic Association and the publishers of 'Disability and Society' which encourage empowerment to disabled people through their journals. Therefore, I intend to make my findings and recommendations available to both the organisations and the publishers. In this way relevant information can be disseminated towards as many people with dyselxia as possible.

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In order to be as inclusive and accountable to the participants as possible I selected a variety of approaches First, I made the findings of the interviews available to the interviewees (in the form of an initial findings paper) Once I had transcribed the interviews, the participants were sent a summary of the findings which gave them an opportunity to further comment on these aspects of the initial findings[3] This enabled a more inclusive environment which added depth to the research.

Second, as many people with dyslexia have poor short-term memory skills (which may have prevented them from discussing specific issues which they felt were important during the initial interview), I gave each participant the chance to have another meeting in which any other issues could be discussed. I also provided them with my email address to enable them to further comment on the interview topics. I asked the participants to meet in surroundings familiar to them in an attempt to put them at ease. Most participants took up this opportunity. The second interview proved very useful in discovering more information on the subject area and some participants mentioned how frustrating it would have been not to have had a further meeting in which to bring up issues they wanted to discuss but had forgotten about during the first interview.

Although familiarity of place was felt to be more empowering to participants, this was confined to a neutral location for reasons of safety for both interviewee and interviewer If their recommended place was deemed not to be acceptable then a reasonable explanation was presented to the interviewee for example, a café

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[3] See interviews

might be too noisy for the recorder to pick up our voices properly. Should they not make a preference then the interviews would be conducted in what might be considered familiar settings. As all participants attended university, rooms within this environment were selected.

These three agendas enabled the research to be accountable to the participants and the researched community of dyslexic people.

A Reflective process and its relevance to the research process

In a further effort to make this research accountable to the dyslexic community, I have continually attempted to address any power configurations that arise throughout the research process through the adoption of a reflexive process. I argue that such a reflexive account can aid the identification and understanding of any power structures which may occur. In this respect I concur with Foucault's argument that power structures are experienced within all aspects and formations of society, and cannot be 'given' to one group/person from another, but can only be 'taken' by one from another (Foucault 1993 cited in Truman et al 2000:185). Humphries (2000:185) states, *'to share power as a researcher'* the researched is *'inevitably implicated in the power of the processes'*. That is as the researcher it is impossible for me to empower others. However, I am able to confront issues in order not to perpetuate dominant discourses of power relations (Humphries 2000:186). To this end, I have used a reflexive diary which enabled me to contemplate concerns, issues and thoughts on the research as they arose.

The reflective diary has been invaluable in terms of confronting how the interviews and the findings are represented. It has facilitated considerations for how the research, including interviews, the final conclusions, and recommendations, may be empowering This includes how representative the research has been in empowering the participants during the interview process Changes have been made according to such reflections including the questions asked and the approaches to the subject area before and during interviews One example of this was a result of asking a participant if she considered her dyslexia a disability. She appeared quite upset at the question stating that she did not have a disability and hated being labelled, disabled.

Although I suspected that many people might not think of themselves as disabled, I was surprised at the emotion the question incurred I asked her if she felt able to discuss her concerns about being referred to as disabled and this presented an interesting insight into the oppressive impact she equated with this term. She replied, *'disabled is a horrible word it means you can't do anything', but I can, and if I tell others that I am disabled they would see me as unable to do things.* This furthered my understanding of the power of language, when just the mention of the word could evoke such feelings It also made me rephrase this question to other interviewees in an attempt to prevent any further distress.

However, I did not refrain from asking the question completely as I felt that it was important to discuss how having the label 'disabled' attached to one's identity and potentially 'hating' that term were resolved I also encouraged the interviewees to attend a second interview, firstly, in order to view a video on a dispatches programme on dyslexia and to discuss their opinions on it and

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secondly to enable them to have a chance to discuss any issues which they thought about after they had asked my opinion on this subject area.

Therefore, with the issues of accountability and reflexivity at the forefront of the interview process, I attempted to empower the interviewees through the following procedures:

- The participants were advised from the outset about the interview process and their right to question or request any changes in the process. (I could then discuss these changes and consider whether they could be made within the boundaries of research processes, such as practicality of the change of locality, time allowance, etc).

- The informants were asked after the interview if they found the process acceptable. I also asked if they would be willing to give their opinions of the initial findings.

- The language used to convey and discuss the subject matter was given due consideration so as not to antagonise or upset the participants intentionally. This acknowledges the possibility that some people with dyslexia might be offended by being referred to as 'disabled' or having a 'disability'.

- The interviewees were informed that they could stop the interview at any time and they could remove any part of the tape should they feel it necessary.

- As all the interviewees described themselves as dyslexic, and in consideration that they might not wish to read, all written material was

explained to them verbally, and any written information was presented in
a brief and clear format

- Finally, I asked the informants if they wanted to ask me any questions or
  if they had any concerns that had arisen from the interview

The procedures could represent 'good' research practice in a non-dyslexic
process. Therefore, this research process is particularly empowering to those
for whom traditional research and power relations could be particularly
detrimental.

Methodological approach to the interviews

Sampling of interviewees

20 participants were drawn up from three universities in the South West: The University of Plymouth, The College of St Mark and St John and The University of Exeter. Recruitment was achieved through a number of outlets, including displaying posters and flyers, which were placed on walls, left in student and staff common rooms and also delivered to specific areas which people enquiring about dyslexia may frequent – such as the disability assist office, (a support office for people with disabilities based at The University of Plymouth). The posters invited volunteers who described themselves as dyslexic to be interviewed on their thoughts and experiences of having this condition. I also included reference to a £20 voucher as an incentive to participate in this study. The advert also gave an email address to reply to[4].

This form of recruitment was decided upon because students who attend higher education have some expectation of achieving and have already achieved some 'success' in that they have acquired the relevant qualifications to enter these establishments. However, the study utilized a snowball strategy. It only encouraged 14 people to come forward; all were women. As I wanted to research both men and women, I sent out more flyers. I had one chance

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[4] See appendix 1

encounter - one man, who was waiting for friends in the library, asked me what I was studying. On explaining my study he then volunteered to have an interview

Another five participants got in touch due to a third person (which included another three men) I felt this recommendation was very beneficial to my research process It showed a measure of acquaintance, even if it was a third party. It was interesting to note that some participants asked if I needed any more interviewees after their own interview. That they asked rather than me suggests they were happy with the interview process As I was short of men, I asked if they knew of any men with dyslexia who would attend an interview and this increased the tally by three

However, the unequal number of males to females was of interest as previous studies which had discussed dyslexic issues often referred to studies with boys (Humphrey and Mullins 2002) or discussed respondents, many of them children with dyslexia, as a homogenous group (Burden 2005, Burden and Burnett 2005; Riddick 2000; Reid and Kirk 2001). I was interested to see if the women in my study would express any differences in their experiences to those in previous studies.

Furthermore, some of the people who answered the flyers were not students but members of staff at these universities. As first, I considered their inclusion into the study as giving another aspect to the issues surrounding living with dyslexia. However, on reflection after the interviews, I discovered some issues could not be answered by theses participants One example of this was discussed by Jane, a 60 year old woman who had a job helping in science laboratories She talked about being quite upset that she had never had the

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opportunity to go to university. As she was retiring the following year she felt unable or unwilling to try to access a higher education course at this time.

The other participants included two class assistants, two pastoral carers and a lecturer in social work. Because none of these women spoke about the experience of attending higher education and with considerations of the 'success stories' I had anticipated at the start of the process, regretfully, I have not presented their thoughts. However, that does not mean I did not register their thoughts at the time and I argue that the interviews enabled me to become more focused on issues arising from the students because of the differences which arose. Thus, I am extremely grateful to them for allowing me to be privy to their experiences and opinions.

During the analysis I discovered themes which grew from the responses of the 14 students. On reflection of this analysis and its association with my subject area and in view of the increasing numbers of students with dyslexia reported to be attending universities, I decided to use a theoretical sampling method to enable me to develop the emerging theory around these students' understanding of living with dyslexia. Thus, the study was able to conduct a specific analysis of these students' thoughts and experiences of living with dyslexia.

In all, 14 students were interviewed from the three universities. The information provided by the other participants provided relevant support to this analysis. It is interesting to find that the students' identifications of themselves as dyslexic fell into two categories. The first category was the majority of participants who stated they were officially diagnosed as dyslexic. The other was one respondent

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who stated that he was self-diagnosed as having the condition That is to say that he was never officially diagnosed with the condition and states he did not feel such an official attachment would be of any use to him in his life choices, at this time.

The 14 participants were between the ages 20 to 40, of which 10 were women and 4 were men I felt that the variation in ages was important, enabling a varied representation from differing life histories and incorporating a differing understanding of education, employment and family experiences between participants.

The initial analysis of the interviewees only discussed the participants who stated they were dyslexic as I wanted initially to explore their personal perceptions of having this label attached to their person. I have also referred to comments made by two 'experts' in the field to inform my research These are an assessor of dyslexia who is attached to one university; and Professor Fawcett, whose main subject area is dyslexia; furthermore she is the editor of 'Dyslexia' (quarterly journal). The issues discussed with them included, who would take the dyslexic test. The assessor said that I would be unusual for someone who is not dyslexic to be officially labelled as dyslexic because of the test, which involves various literacy and memory tests and also taking family history as well as discussing previous experiences. Also, the various tests highlight a variety of difficulties. This was interesting in view of the recent description from Graham Stringer, Labour MP (2009) who stated that dyslexia was a myth continuing to be referenced only because of poor teaching methods.

Constructing the questions – Themes and specific questions

The questions arose from a 'need' to enquire how these individuals informed their identity with this condition. I felt that simply asking this question might be confusing and would not prompt the information which I felt could lead me to understand how their experiences had been understood and had impacted on their sense of self with this condition.

Therefore, through an exploration of studies around dyslexic issues and through researching the newspaper articles, I settled on a number of issues which I considered might impact on both their understanding of dyslexia and how that view had impacted on their experience with others. These included: when they first realised they were dyslexic; if they could give me some examples of when they felt their dyslexia had impacted on their experiences with others; what they felt about such experiences; if they told other people about their dyslexia and what reasons did they give for informing or not informing others. I also included questions around the term disability and what they felt about that term, their definition of disability and if they perceived dyslexia as disabling.

My final questions concerned their understanding of dyslexia: in what ways they considered dyslexia had impacted on them and their abilities and whether they would like a cure to be found. The final question considered if or how dyslexia had influenced their identity.

The reasons for these questions were the dominant discourses of dyslexia which present it as both an inability and a disabling condition referenced in the medical model and acknowledged in previous studies (discussed in chapter 1). References to dyslexia as an inability and references to curing this condition

were expressed within newspaper articles It was necessary to see if and how such representations had influenced both the interactions of these participants and how they reacted to such ideas in relation to their understanding of their abilities

Furthermore, because research has identified areas of low self-esteem in children with dyslexia, I also considered it important to investigate how they saw themselves and their experiences when they were children and in what respect their thoughts had changed or stayed the same as adults.

Conducting interviews

All the interviews except one were audio taped (always with the interviewee's permission) I explained that this was mainly because of my own difficulty with note taking and remembering information over the short term as a person with dyslexia. In addition, having an audio version of the interview allows for a more in-depth analysis of the interview During one interview the recorder failed to work which meant I only took notes.

The initial interviews lasted between 20 minutes and 1hour and 30 minutes. This was entirely dependent on the respondent and what they had to say on the subject area They were given as much information as possible at the end of each interview Thus, I gave each respondent two papers which I discussed with them (see appendix three). These papers contained a list of web addresses of organisations and groups that specifically represented dyslexic issues The second paper contained email addresses useful for finding information on areas that I considered the participants may have wished to view after the interview (which related to topics that arose from the interview). This

included specific disability organisations and information on counselling services.

After the first 10 interviews I formed an initial brief overview of the findings, which was given to the participants via email for their opinions. They were only asked for a brief opinion of the subjects which arose.

The initial response was poor with only four of the fourteen participants making any comment and these were brief. A number of explanations were considered for this low response rate. First, the information asked for may have been too extensive. Although the findings were presented in report format (with brief notes, broken up into sections with sub-headings), the problem could have been the large amount of information (quantity) not the format (quality).

Another reason could have been a timing issue. As the emails were sent in early February, when most students might be engaged in revising for exams, they may have had little time or energy to read and digest the information. Another could have been reporting back by email. The fact that some people with dyslexia are hesitant to write may have prevented a response. On reflection, these issues could have had a detrimental effect on their willingness to participate. Nevertheless, the four participants who did voice their opinions (even though somewhat briefly), have been taken into account in the analysis. Furthermore, I felt that a second interview would provide another opportunity for these individuals to discuss their ideas.

As many dyslexic people have poor short-term memories (Snowling 2000) (for example some stated during the interviews that they had forgotten what they wanted to say), I recommended a second interview to each participant. This

worked well Some of the participants mentioned their pleasure at having extra time to think about the issues On reflection, this became an important empowering process that enabled participants to reflect and validate on what they had previously said Another empowering process occurred around the issues they had reflected on in this second interview. At the request of some participants, the second interview was often undertaken in a local cafe or student lounge.

Although such environments are communal, students appeared relaxed and not hesitant (given the setting) in continuing to discuss their thoughts on the subject area The familiarity of the setting and the relaxed atmosphere often led to a conversational approach to the interview, which encouraged some participants to ask questions on issues discussed. As a researcher, I considered the impact on the research and the influence my remarks might have on their understanding of the subject area.

However, I argue that the participants' responses are shaped through a range of social contexts including the interview process (Silverman 1997). Thus, the interviewer and interviewee are embedded within the interview process, creating meanings and shaping thoughts through the act of 'speech events' (Gillespie 2001:117) Thus, the interview process is not a neutral tool to 'collect' information but an event in which participants actively interpret information discussed.

Furthermore, I believe when encouraging an empowering interview process I have an obligation to respond to enquiries or queries if possible Therefore, if they asked me for my opinion on any topic, I made a conscious decision to

discuss my own thoughts on the subject. However, to lessen the influence of my thoughts on the interview, I approached this exchange of information within specific guidelines. I made it clear that my personal opinion originated from my own experiences as a dyslexic person.

Furthermore, such discussions were only instigated after the main interview was ended. I argue that these exchanges were beneficial to both parties. Some of the participants appeared more inclined to express thoughts which had previously not been explored (some saying they had verbalised some thoughts about their dyslexic state which they had never told anyone before). However, to instil and to keep to the interview agenda, I always asked for permission from each participant to utilise the information given in this second meeting.

Data processing

The next process was the transcribing and analysis of the recorded interviews. At first I started to transcribe them which became time consuming and they appeared to lose some of the meaningfulness embedded within the interactions between me and the interviewee. As I wanted to study the discursive configurations of interviews, this did not seem to be the most suitable procedure for this research.

Therefore, I changed the transcribing process and began a more inductive procedure. This entailed listening to the interviews individually a number of times and then writing a full and detailed account of what had been said, including all the criteria encapsulated within the discussion. This allowed for

interpretation of how issues were narrated, as well as the content. I did, however, later transcribe some interview data that related to the themes that arose from the analysis

Once I had transcribed some of the recordings and completed my in-depth summaries I formed subheadings of the topics discussed and how each individual responded to that topic This gave me a starting point for the analysis.

Analysis

The analysis consisted of primarily a visual format. Again, as a dyslexic researcher I find information (especially if it is in vast quantities) far easier to evaluate and comprehend in a visual format. Therefore, I chose an excel spreadsheet in which I wrote the topic areas discussed within each interview in one column and put the participants' thoughts on that topic in the following columns. Examples of these are seen in appendix 2. Topics included information such as when each person was officially diagnosed as dyslexic (if ever) Thus, in the sub-headings I recorded whether people were newly diagnosed, diagnosed in adulthood, diagnosed at school or never diagnosed and their thoughts on being labelled as dyslexic etc Each respondent then had a colour-coded bar placed against the relevant sub-heading This enabled a presentation of their thoughts and experiences to appear within five specific themes

These themes were then cross-sectioned around how they identified themselves and their experiences within these defining factors in order to explore in more depth any links or differences between the individuals concerned. It was at this juncture that I found there were differences between some of the men's and women's views of their understanding of their dyslexia. This finding was analysed within the themes and categories which appear below.

This process enabled me to cluster certain interviewees in order to see if particular issues were being discussed and to examine some of the instances in which the similarities and the differences of the participants' narratives were forming. From the findings which appear 'within' this holistic framework, I have explored the participants' views and individual narratives or anecdotes, analysing the topics and issues within their own individual perceptions and identity. These themes and categories include:

- Their reflections of their experiences at school;

  o How these reflections were presented as impacting on their understanding of their abilities;

  o How these thoughts of their experiences within school related to their gender;

- How the label of dyslexia impacted on their personal understanding of themselves;

  o The relief which some participants equated to the official diagnosis of dyslexia;

- o Hesitancy to disclose their condition,

- o The view that they would not want to be 'cured' from this condition

- The understanding of their dyslexia as a disability;

  - o The definition of disability when they applied it to their own identity as a person with dyslexia,
  - o Thoughts of their opinions of themselves as having a disability,

Their private understanding of themselves with dyslexia

  - o The benefits of having this condition, dyslexia as a gift

To enable the participants' lived experiences to be established I have presented the analysis of the interviews through the participants' 'voices'· how the participants have expressed living with their dyslexia is discussed through their personal reflections which are then analysed. It is anticipated that through using all these processes, a more in-depth and realistic account of these individuals' experiences and understandings of their identity with dyslexia has been presented and the link with disability explored.

Stage 2 – Methodological approaches to the media analysis

Methods for acquiring the newspaper articles for this study

Newspaper sales continue to decline:

> *The national newspaper market is considerably smaller in volume terms than was the case 30 or 40 years ago and most of this reduction was inevitable given the major changes in lifestyle that have occurred (Social Trends 2005).*

However, Lord Fowler (2008) stated '45% of the population read one of the top 10 national newspapers on an average day' (Lord Fowler, the chairman of the communications committee online 2008 Jan) and some newspapers have increased their readership over the last few years. These include the Times and Sunday Times (Brooke 2007). Therefore, because of the availability of newspaper articles and as a high proportion of the British population read a daily and Sunday newspaper, it was felt that this would provide a relevant source of social representation through the written word.

It is argued that *'sampling in print media may be restricted to specific types or genres of content'* (Hansen et al 1988:104). Nevertheless, in accepting that using newspaper articles will exclude other sources of written reports such as cartoons, adverts and other specialist papers, I feel this is a necessary exclusion as the vastness of articles would be too problematic to contain within this thesis. However, to gain a fuller and richer picture of all aspects which refer to dyslexic issues, I have included any reference to dyslexia within the chosen

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newspaper articles (Hansen, Cottle, Negrine and Newbold 1988). Also, it must be acknowledged that differing representations are presented in different newspaper genres (Behurrell in Eldridge 1993) Therefore, I have taken into account how language is used differently in the storylines of both broadsheet and tabloid newspapers.

Also, it has been highlighted that the varied genres within newspapers have different readership groups (Social Trends 2005; Eldridge et al 1997). Tabloid readership includes football fans or younger or older women, and broadsheet more tightly defined interest groups, *'segmenting their content accordingly, often with different dedicated sections through the week'* (National Statistics 2008:1). Therefore, I have taken into account the need to give a more diverse picture of differing readerships by looking at a distribution of newspaper reports within both tabloid and broadsheets (This will be discussed in more detail in 'Sampling').

Furthermore, to acquire a more varied and in-depth evaluation of the language and references which have been continually used, I have chosen a distribution date for articles which spans a number of years (2000 – 2008). I have methodically chosen a sample from this time period to represent a wide and extensive coverage of the reports being expressed. However, as the number exceeded 4800 articles, I have endeavoured to select a diverse sample These continue to incorporate a varied topic base whilst allowing an in-depth awareness of the content and construction of the language used around dyslexic issues to be explored Therefore, the study consisted of researching articles that contain the word dyslexic or dyslexia over an eight-year period This period of time has enabled me to compare differences within storylines

relating to dyslexia, and how the use of language and terminology has changed over time.

Sampling and data collection: newspapers

Analysing media portrayals of dyslexia

In presenting this study on British newspaper portrayals of dyslexia, I refer back to Hansen's warning of the restrictive aspect of using only 'print media' (Hansen et al 1988:104). However, as this study already includes interviews to discuss these issues further, I considered it sufficient to limit my media analysis to a study of newsprint only. Thus, I explored articles which referenced the words dyslexia or dyslexic within a selection of broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. It was considered relevant to explore both types of newspaper because the reading population often differs between broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. As National Statistics (2008:1) identifies:

> Different types of newspaper are being read by different groups of readers, including sub-groups.
>
> In the case of most tabloids, these sub-groups will be fairly broadly defined, for instance as football fans or younger or older women. The broadsheet titles in general aim to provide coverage within more tightly defined interest groups, segmenting their content accordingly, often with different dedicated sections through the week

However, it has been argued that many tabloid newspapers gain storylines from broadsheet articles. Thus, while it is necessary to explore tabloid newspaper articles, it was considered important to have a representation of broadsheet

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newspaper articles also. The study found that the majority of articles which referenced dyslexia were found in broadsheet newspapers. However, as concentrating mainly on this one type of newspaper may not give a broad enough base for enquiry, the study also included articles from a tabloid paper, 'The Sun'

Consequently, it provided a more diverse representation of language, content and storyline, in an attempt to avoid accusations of bias. Moreover, 'The Sun' is relevant as it attracts the highest reading population of over eight million readers per day (Wade 2008) and has a different population of readers than broadsheet newspapers Social Trends (2005) reports·

> *The most widely read daily newspaper (by adults aged 15 and over) in Great Britain is The Sun, with almost one in four men and just over one in six women reading it, on average.... People aged 15 to 24 are the most likely to read The Sun.*

The data set was generated through the search engine Lexis Nexus using the key words 'dyslexia' and 'dyslexic' to obtain all relevant articles which mentioned these terms over the time period 2000 – 2008

However, initial investigations took me by surprise as Lexis Nexus generated over 4,500 references. I considered it would be difficult to give an in-depth review of all of these articles in view of their quantity and the time allotted for this research Therefore, the sample size was reduced through sub-sampling and identifying the newspapers that contained the highest references to dyslexic or dyslexia in their article and then selecting the articles per quartile so allowing for differences in subjects, topics and themes to be revealed

Graph 1 shows that the papers with the highest amount of articles incorporating dyslexic issues within the years 2000-2008 were 'The Times' newspaper with 750 references and 'The Guardian' newspaper with 604. As the other newspaper groups tended either to include the Sunday paper or have a lower number of articles, I concluded, therefore, that 'The Guardian' and 'The Times' would be the most fruitful newspapers to investigate. This also served to represent a broadly balanced left/right political spectrum of newspaper output.

No of articles which included the term dyslexia in each newspaper durring 2000-2008
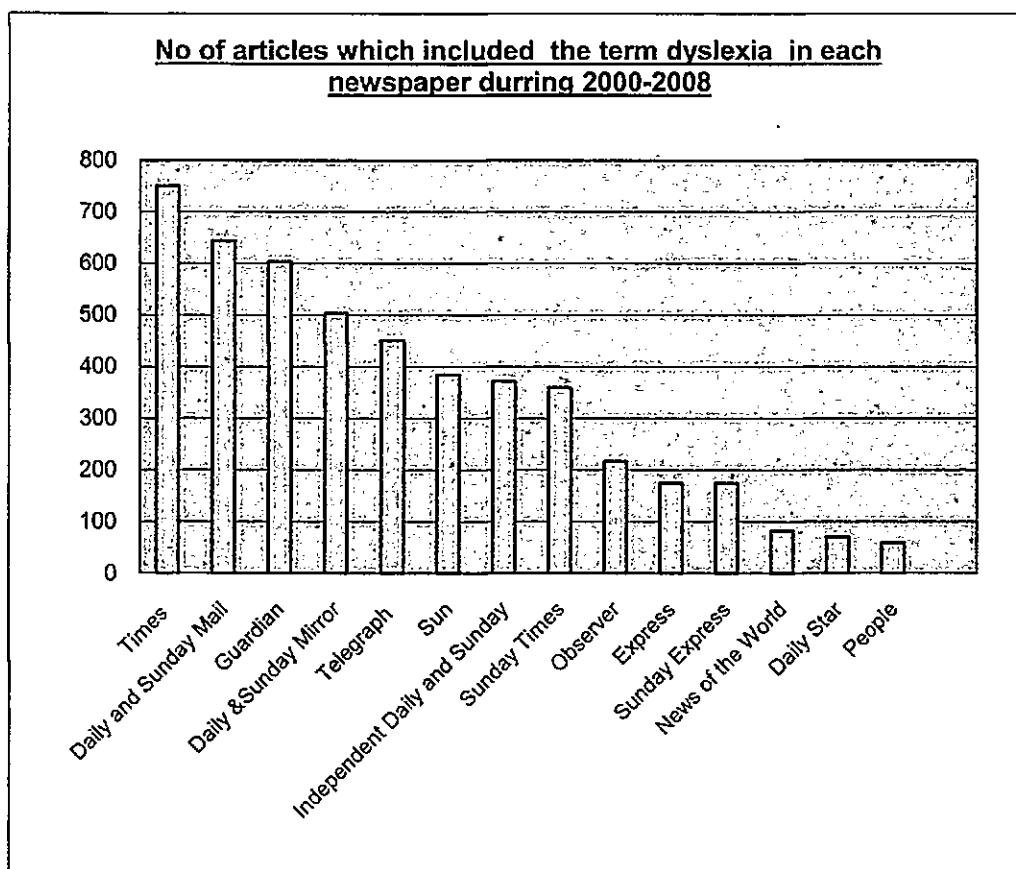
Graph 1

I have also included a Sunday paper because it provides a different emphasis compared to daily newspapers, as previously mentioned (National Statistics

2008) 'The Sunday Times' was chosen because it published more articles that included reference to dyslexia/dyslexic than some daily papers (such as 'the Observer' and 'the Express').

A number of articles within a number of newspapers often related to singular events; one example of this was seen when acknowledging the representative number of articles within the Sunday newspapers. However, the biggest sample relating to education issues appeared in 'The Sunday Times'. One of the reasons for this was the large percentage of sections of 'The Sunday Times' in November 2002/3 which incorporated a list of private schools. The schools included whether they had facilities for dyslexic children. 'The Sunday Times' in 2002 stated that over 97 private secondary schools and 47 primary schools included a mention of such facilities (which is over half of the schools listed) References to amenities for pupils with dyslexia included· *"specialist staff for children with dyslexia" (Sunday Times 2000; "all staff are trained to be 'dyslexic-friendly"* (2002); *"dyslexic unit with specialist staff"* (2003); and *"specialist teachers for dyslexia and speech and language difficulties"* (2003). This shows that dyslexia is not only acknowledged by various schools but certainly in the private sector they are catering for dyslexia or are at least acknowledging the need for educational aid within public schools.

However, whilst these references could be used to consider how these schools are increasing their availability for pupils who are dyslexic, as the framing of these issues were contained within a specific list it was considered only as a reference to schools' allocations of dyslexic support and did not acknowledge any other issues or storylines around dyslexia

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Therefore, the newspapers were selected to represent diversity of coverage across time and topics, rather than reactive stories to particular events or lists. However, to promote this diversity and to include the in-depth criteria incorporating the issues, terminology and language, this sample of over 1700 articles from the four newspapers mentioned required further reduction. This was achieved through a quantitative and qualitative process. As the number of articles which incorporate dyslexia have steadily increased over the time period from 2000-2008, and because of the necessity to explore a diversity of issues over time, as well as topic, it was necessary to create a structure to accommodate all these issues.

Therefore, I chose the highest number of relevant articles in retrospect within the first five years as these had roughly a similar amount of articles within them, then chose the highest relevant three months within each year. To give an overview of the articles, I also took into account 'The Sunday Times' lists which might have distorted the numbers. Over the five-year period of 2000-2005, this totalled 213 articles taken from the months below:

- April to June 2000

- January, to March 2002

- October to December 2003

- July to September 2005

To accommodate a considerable increase in the number of relevant newspaper articles, which rose by over 100% over the time period (from 220 in the year 2000 to 522 in 2008), I felt it necessary to include a larger proportion of more

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recent articles. This would enable an exploration of the terminology and presentation of dyslexic issues for comparability over time.

Therefore, I selected a further 223 articles from the same newspapers from November 2007 to November 2008. I have not chosen 2006 as the number of articles seemed to increase to a greater extent after this period. Reasons for this could include legal issues such as the regulations that came into effect in October 2004 around the acceptance by employers of people with disabilities into their workforce Given the time scale between experiencing discrimination and applying to the legal system, such issues might not be processed or reach the courts and, therefore, be highlighted within newspaper articles for some time. However, this is only a suggestion and because the focus of this study is the context of and the language used around dyslexia, within the articles, I consider this issue required more attention than I could give at this time.

Thus, I continued with my overall selection. In all this totalled 436 articles over the eight-year period This is approximately 10% of the initial sample, or one quarter of the articles from the four newspapers used within this study. In brief, I sampled longitudinal data in order to explore any changes in discourse that occurred across time

Analysis was inductive allowing the text to speak for itself, thus allowing the research to examine themes as they emerged from the data However, I had some specific issues to explore around how the language and content had been formed. In retrospect, to instigate a research process which empowers the dyslexic community, this research needed to explore the ways that power within language, tone, and context could be understood Therefore, my interest went

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beyond content analysis towards an emphasis on understanding within discourse analysis. Initially this was very broad. However, as part of the inductive process of discourse and reflection, the various themes emerging from the first stage of the findings were used to form further categories within the conceptual framework. The investigation moved between analysis and the conceptual framework as research progressed. The articles were evaluated using a framework developed by Regan De Bere and Petersen (2006) which advocates complex reflection on media discourses. This approach highlighted

> *the importance of news making as a social process, in as far as the way in which views and counterviews in news exist to be defended or rebutted in a dialogical process that causes ideologies and opinions to shift and change" (2006: 9).*

Within a temporal element, some reporting on dyslexic matters examined issues relating to the ideologies of individual tragedy and social barriers. This included the 'blame regime', which imparts the theory that an inability to compete in society is due, in part, to the individual's lack of control, (the medical model[5]) and the 'cure culture', which enforces the requirement to control or 'normalise' the individual through social intervention. It also included the representation of social barriers that are presented as impeding disabled individuals (including people who are dyslexic) from living as equal citizens in society (the social model).

The analysis of media portrayals of the references to dyslexia and dyslexic used a qualitative research tool, namely N6. This research tool was used to organise and manage the data. It was not used for analysis or to replace the researcher.

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[5] Explored in chapter 1

However, due to the richness of the data sets and the complexity with which the data linked, this tool was used to section and sub-section articles into topic areas and references which linked to specific issues. These topic areas include: education; medical concepts, personal accounts; and general descriptors which refer to specific meanings. These were then sub-sectioned within these specific areas and interlinked to the other sections to explore comparisons and differences of language, context and meanings.

In terms of analytical approach, I employed an overtly critical stance Thus, I actively sought to explore whether the reporting of these issues has stayed static over the period of time, reinforcing the status quo or whether certain issues surrounding the context in which dyslexia has been presented have altered.

The inductive process developed emphasising clear themes and sub-themes which could potentially impact on the portrayal and representation of dyslexia. I contend that these themes infer certain perceptions of dyslexia, which could impact on social awareness of the condition and people described as having dyslexia. These areas include:

- The contents and topics which have dyslexic or dyslexia mentioned within them. (Themes used)

- **Use of Headlines**

- **Themes in detail**

  o **Colloquial reference**

  o **Personal barrier**

- **Need for cure or control**

- **Justification to control through correlations to anti-social behaviour**

  o **Social barriers**

  o **Individual stories and their links to social barriers of employment**

  o **Individual stories and their connection to the benefits of the condition**

Contents

- How the issues are framed (language used, topics of relevance)

- If the topic is specific to dyslexic issues (subjects or description of systems)

- How evidence has been represented around issues of dyslexia

- Conclusion

Conclusion

Many valuable contributions have been made to research relating to dyslexic issues, but the majority of research has focused on only two aspects of dyslexia. First, a medical agenda has investigated how the body (in this case the brain) performs differently from other allegedly 'normal' functions (i.e. the differences between the 'dyslexic brain' and the 'non dyslexic brain' in certain respects). Second, research has sought to establish how society can aid or if possible, cure, the abnormality known as dyslexia. This can be seen in the

treatment of children termed dyslexic in schools via policies, legal acts and the application of different types of teaching methods assumed to be applicable for children with dyslexia

However, there has been a considerable vacuum in research around how the public is informed of dyslexic issues, or how living with this condition impacts on the identity of people with dyslexia in terms of both how they feel others perceive them and how they view themselves

The research strategy within this thesis is based on the need to provide an in-depth study and an analysis of identity and discourses of dyslexia. The theoretical prospectus regulates the analysis through a qualitative research process to examine related issues of social awareness and individual experience.

This methodological approach develops a framework through which to explore power relations between social awareness of dyslexic issues and personal understanding of living with this condition   The findings of the research are presented within the next two chapters

CHAPTER 4 - EXPLORING UK NATIONAL PRESS PORTRAYALS OF DYSLEXIA

The previous chapters discussed how dyslexia has been referred to as a medical and educational anomaly; in particular how dyslexia has been seen as 'different' to social expectations of 'normal' bodily and intellectual functions. This thesis has also discussed how the representation of an identity is subject, to a certain extent, to social and cultural values and attitudes which inform and reform individual understanding: that is to say, the individual's understanding of him/herself (Humphrey and Mullins 2002). Consequently, individual perception and formation of identity rely on a number of factors, not least of which is how and in what respects dyslexia is presented and referred to within the context and application of language.

Language is thought to play an important part in an individual's understandings of their world, not only as a descriptor, but as an informant. That is to say: "knowledge and language are rigorously interwoven" into the fabric of society (Foucault 1966:96). Thus knowledge is only understood through language and although language is not a perfect representation of knowledge it is through words, which are interwoven with "history, fashions, customs, and periods of oblivion" (1966:126), that we assemble a meaning. Consequently, the interwoven representations and inferences of language also inform the individual's understanding of both themselves and of other people in the world, and also when making judgements about both their own identity as social entities and that of 'others'.

One form of communication which habitually seeks to notify and influence through language is the use and depiction of texts within the media (Prior 1997). Media has been seen to play an important role in shaping the arguments around specific subject areas. Boykoff (2007:478) states

> *Mass media have constituted key non-state interventions in shaping the variegated and politicised terrain within which people perceive, understand and engage with climate science and policy.*

However, it has been argued that the impact of media presentations on individual or social understanding of subject areas is not definitive. Researchers have been very vocal in their argument that readers are not passive respondents to the media messages ('hypodermic' model) Many argue that media influence on individuals is complex (Eldridge et al 1997). However, it has been stated that 'research consistently reveals a clear correspondence between certain recurrent themes in news reporting and what is recalled, understood and sometimes believed by audience groups' (Eldridge et al 1997:161). Kitzinger (in Eldridge et al 1997) discusses how individuals in their recognition of the understanding of AIDS often reflect media representations of the condition.

Seale also contends that media representations can impact on people's thought processes on a subject or topic, which can affect how they act and what they believe.

> *Many (if not all) do seem to soak up prejudices, copy unhealthy habits, and distrust doctors and medicines unreasonably when media health stories encourage these things (Seale 2002:212).*

These arguments, whilst deducing that media influence on social assumptions is not conclusive, do suggest that there is a correlation, at times, of what is presented between the media and what audiences may understand and believe (Eldridge 1997).

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Therefore, this study provides a discourse analysis which explores how texts, language and terminology have been used within the media to determine how this usage has impacted on the dialogue surrounding individuals who are described as dyslexic. With this in mind, the data is composed from newspaper articles from the UK national press which referenced dyslexia.

Media representations of dyslexia in newspaper articles

The dataset consisted of articles taken from UK National newspapers from the years 2000-2008. The study examined The Sunday Times, The Times, The Guardian, and The Sun, and the sample was accessed through Lexis Nexus, using the key words of 'dyslexia' and 'dyslexic'. Newspaper articles were considered to be appropriate for this study for numerous reasons and the resources of the study (i.e. the time and cost) needed to be taken into consideration. Furthermore, national newspapers are regarded as influential, in some respects, due to the number of readers (Boykoff 2007), and average circulation.

> *Thirty-seven million people read a national newspaper every week, and 84% of UK adults read a national newspaper on a monthly basis. In the age of rolling 24-hour news coverage, national newspapers are read by 77% of adults in a week. This amounts to 33 million readers on weekdays and 30 million readers at weekends* (National marketing agency 2008).

The newspapers in this study consisted of a daily tabloid newspaper, (The Sun) two broadsheets (The Times and The Guardian) and a Sunday newspaper (The Sunday Times). It was anticipated that such a range would provide access to a diverse reading population. Evidence has found that *'Readers identify strongly with 'their' paper; it provides a very personal connection to reader's emotions' (National marketing agency 2008).* In this instance The Sun was also chosen due to its large circulation of over 8 million readers (average reading

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population over a six month period January 08 – June 08 National Newspaper

Marketing Agency 2009) as compared to the broadsheets who had an average

reading population The Times has a reading population of over 1 and a quarter

million, (3.7% of the British population 2009): The Sunday Times over 3 and a

quarter million (6.7% of population), and the Guardian over 1 million (2.5% of

British population). Whilst these references propose research of a quantitative

nature, the study also referred to a qualitative methodology. This considered the

arguments that 'broadsheets' are considered to have a major influence on

certain policy making decisions on both a national and international level

(Boykoff 2007).

Furthermore, popular press or tabloid newspapers are also said to inform

readers.

> *Popular press has always expressed a rich engagement with the*
> *dissemination of cultural norms and survives on its ability to maintain a*
> *dialogue with contemporary cultural trends"* (Conboy 2002 1).

Thus, it takes little effort for the reader to become informed due to reader and

newspaper collaboration within a shared understanding of the meaning

presented within the articles.

This is reinforced with the dissemination of information through the structure

and layout of a typical broadsheet and tabloid newspaper which offers the

casual reader the opportunity to 'stumble' onto items of information to which

newspaper 'language' attaches 'meaning' (Curran 2002) Thus, the discourse

analysis proposes to discuss how the articles dissimulate themes within the

language and context used around its subject

It was interesting to see that there has been a steady increase in newspapers

referring to dyslexia within their articles, this increase is seen through the use of

the word dyslexia or dyslexic in the headlines of British national newspapers. In the year 2000 dyslexia was referenced 38 times whilst in 2007 headline references to dyslexia had increased to 78. As this is over a 100% rise, it was felt important to explore the latest articles as well as the previous reports in order to discern how references to dyslexia corresponded throughout the period. This study then presents a discourse analysis of the context, tone and concept in which dyslexia is described within 436 newspaper articles (213 articles taken from reports from 2000-2005 and the rest taken from 2007-2008 from the newspapers mentioned and discussed further in methodology chapter). This is 10% of the total articles from all national newspapers or one quarter of the articles of the papers mentioned above.

The findings of this exploration are that dyslexia is represented within discursive formations of 'difference'. The chapter therefore, explores both the frame of reference in which 'difference' is portrayed when referring to dyslexia and the social implications of the meaning deduced from this contextualisation. These discursive formations of 'difference' focus on four areas: the media's ability to use the word dyslexia as a colloquialism to infer difference in ability; the construct of dyslexia as 'difference' in bodily function (described within the personal tragedy theory or medical model of disability theory) requiring a 'cure' or 'control'; how social understanding of dyslexia as an inability has impacted on references to employment; and representations of dyslexia as 'different' through social barriers (social model of disability) which impact on individual experiences and opinions of having or being seen as having dyslexia (with reference to individuals who see dyslexia as a benefit). The study begins with a discussion on how the media underpins general understandings of dyslexia as an 'inability'.

Discussion of findings

Dyslexia in 'joke' form

One of the most interesting findings in this study is the use of the word dyslexia within a specific meaning or representation One example is the 'meaning' associated with the term when presented within a joke The use of the term within this context gives a good indication of the meaning referred to The Sun (2008) states,

> *A dyslexic man walks into a bra ... (Sun 2008a).*

> *DID you hear about the dyslexic pimp? He bought a warehouse* (Sun 2008a).

It would be impossible to discuss all the social implications and nuances associated with cultural expectations of a joke. However, it must be acknowledged that to enable the joke to 'work' a 'general' understanding of the 'term' is required. It is evident from the context of these jokes that the meaning extended to the term is a difficulty with reading and writing skills Should the reader be unable to corroborate this then the joke would be useless. Thus, describing the term within a joke requires the reader to have an awareness of the cultural assumptions of dyslexia. The joke expects the reader, as a social member, to participate in the 'fun' attached to the reference In this instance the 'tone' and structure of language have been manipulated to reinforce cultural references of dyslexia within negative images (Barnes et al 1999:191)

That this reference to dyslexia within the construction of a joke was in the Sun as opposed to the other papers has a number of implications. The acknowledgement that the reading population of the Sun is over 8 million suggests that a large proportion of it has a specific awareness of dyslexia in

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order to comprehend the joke. It further implies that the editors of the Sun believe their reading population will understand the references within the joke and as research shows that readers of the Sun are made up of a specific reading population, mainly representative of football fans and older and younger women (Social Trends 2005), it would imply that this readership has an awareness of both the term and certain meanings associated with it[1] (Park et al 2007).

It is also interesting to see that the jokes have only been presented from the years 2007-2008. Out of the 47 articles of that time span 20% included a joke about dyslexia. This suggests that the publishers suspect that their readers are more likely to understand the meanings attached to the joke at this time. Barnes states that members of a society become immersed in its ideology through its *cultural assumptions and rules' (Barnes et al 1999:183)*. Thus, these jokes underpin social assumptions that dyslexia is a reading and writing difficulty.

Dyslexia as a colloquial term for 'inability'

Other newspapers also refer to cultural assumptions associated with dyslexia. Examples of this were found in all three broadsheets through their use of dyslexia as a 'synonym'. That is to say, they expressed 'dyslexia' as encapsulating certain values or ideologies. Examples include,

> *She was tone deaf, useless at sport and socially dyslexic (Staples, The Times 2000)*

> *Its emotional dyslexia...you know what the occasion is; you just can't rise to it (Gardiner The Guardian 2000)*

> *"He is a tactical dyslexic" (Dickinson Times 2002)*

> *Compared with these young dancers you feel dyslexic and cack-handed (Grove Times 2003) and*

> *Digitally dyslexic or nomadically inclined (Gaudoin The Times 2003).*

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[1] See methodologies on representations of readers

These mainly one-off remarks present an insight into how some newspapers are using the term 'dyslexia' to underpin cultural assumptions of the value attached to this word. This is evident in the apparent ease with which Grove compares dyslexia to feelings of inadequacy in her performance, even though such inferences could be discriminatory. This apparent colloquialism, in which the term is 'normalised' to represent a general description of inability, is evident in the reference to being 'socially dyslexic' and 'emotionally' dyslexic.

These references imply that a more social rather than physical description is being implied to the meaning of the term As with the joke, the reporter expects the meaning of the term to be readily endorsed by the reader. However, unlike the reference to a difficulty in reading and writing, these comments suggest a more general concept of dyslexia and signify an inability or lack of ability in the wider context. Moreover, to 'share' in this context also strengthens the value placed upon it. As Barnes (1999:184) states:

> *Human cultures both set the criteria for, or the boundary lines around, what is' considered 'normal' and typical, and the responses to those categorized as 'different'.*

This categorisation of difference is also significant when members of parliament are reported to be using the word dyslexia in such a manner. As seen in the quote,

> *. .murally dyslexic: he does not see the writing on the wall" (Simon de Bruxelles Times 2002).*

The context in which dyslexia is referred to here and its relevance value as an indicator of inability requires some explanation. The first issue is the quote 'murally dyslexic' This reference refers to the then Chancellor Gordon Brown and his inability to see 'the writing on the wall'. This reference reinforces how embedded is the association of inability with dyslexia The author's expectation

that the reader will understand the age-old metaphor of 'writing on the wall' is credible, given the general familiarity of the expression. However, the expectation that the reference 'murually' dyslexic will also make sense to the reader is interesting. This connection suggests that dyslexia is already viewed as a form of 'inability'.

The confidence displayed in all these references is the gauge of the newspapers belief that it and the reader 'share' the same understanding of dyslexia. That is to say, the meaning media equates with dyslexia is presented within an ideology whose context and content coexist within a general misrepresentation of dyslexia (Van Dijk). *'It is this ideology that explains why specific groups are dealt with positively or negatively'* (Van Dijk 1991:147). Thus, it is apparent that the categorisation of dyslexia as a reading /writing difficulty within The Sun, has been utilised in these broadsheets as a general or 'colloquial' reference to all types of inability and social ineptitude.

This is interesting in a number of respects. That this colloquial representation of dyslexia is even used by certain members of parliament, suggests that it is both recognised as and considered to be an acceptable use of the term in social circles other than the media. This is relevant given that dyslexia is officially described as a disability, and both legal and political circles advocate the eradication of oppressive discriminatory terms associated with disabling conditions[2]. The acceptance of the term and its use by 'respected' members of the community raises the question, would it still be acceptable if another disabled condition replaced the term 'dyslexia' in these articles? Disabled theorists have argued that using language which infers discriminatory views

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[2] Please see references to dyslexia as a disability in previous chapters

needs to be challenged (Barnes 1997) However, research into dyslexia has found that the condition is often not associated with or considered to be a disability (Hales 1995). The justification for this individual's use of dyslexia to present it as a general meaning of inability and the use of this term as the butt of a joke and the lack of challenges to this usage suggests that dyslexia is being viewed as different to other disabling conditions This concept of dyslexia encapsulates certain values and ideologies which prompts the suggestion that dyslexia is not a 'real' disability but a 'label' to be mocked.

Such references rely on the audience's 'universal' or 'stereotypical' understanding of difference. Barnes equates this difference to meanings of 'abnormality' or lack of ability (Barnes et al 1999) Such references used to infer meanings of abnormality could also impact on the social understanding of the level of ability of people described as different.

Dyslexia as impairment or as 'difference' (Medical model)

References to dyslexia as a difference are not simply presented as general descriptions of inability, they also prescribe specific meanings of dyslexia as a condition. An example of this is seen in a reference to youngsters playing chess The reporter phrases it:

> *It is not only bright children who benefit from chess. Autistic and dyslexic children do too* (Neustatter Sunday Times 2002)

Although the report discusses the belief that all young people will benefit from playing chess, the reference to some children as 'bright', and others as 'autistic and dyslexic' ensures a direct comparison between the two groups. The phrase

'not only bright children...dyslexic children do too' assumes that children who are dyslexic are not bright. The reference here not only states this view but also presents it as a fact. The inference 'it is not only...' implies that this comparison is a natural response to the perceived differences between these groups.

The articles also provide evidence to support their statements. This evidence is often presented as an 'expert' in the field. The 'expert' validates the report as factual. An example of this is seen in the following report.

> Dr Evens states 'Dyslexic research is a complex area and it is quite easy to uncover something that normal readers can do well but which people who have dyslexia struggle to master' (Peta Bee Times 2000).

Once more, the comparison of people with dyslexia to 'normal' readers presupposes that people with dyslexia will not be 'normal' readers. The reference to something that 'normal readers can do well but which people with dyslexia struggle to master' infers that all people with dyslexia will have difficulties reading. The use of the 'expert' opinion reinforces this statement as factual. Its presentation of 'authorities or experts' in specific topic areas is seen to give credence to the arguments within the article. (Van Dijk 1991). Whilst this can be seen as informative, in that the reader is given an understanding of the difficulties some people with dyslexia face, its implication that all people with dyslexia will struggle in this area could be detrimental to their eligibility to be seen as dyslexic if they have 'good' or average reading skills (Tresman 2006).

The presentation of dyslexia as a reading and writing difference can also be problematic (Snowling 2000). Miller and Williams (1989) in their study on HIV/AIDS also found that media representations in news articles tended to be

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topic specific and often incorporated inaccuracies or misrepresentations of the facts on the subject   They found that such representations reinforced stereotypes and masked other features of the condition Similar to this is the social discernment of dyslexia within a particular frame of reference. Therefore, continuing to refer to the features of dyslexia as a reading difficulty implies that people who can read cannot have dyslexia.

This reference to difference is not only discussed within the body of articles but is also seen in the headline of some articles. The language and representation of the subject area within the headline is very important.   The emphasis on certain words in headlines can influence a reader's comprehension of dyslexia. Headlines condense the major themes into short and sometimes sensational 'one liners' thus directing the reader's attention to certain issues to the exclusion of others (Van Dijk 1991). An example of this is:

"*Dyslexic brains*" (The Times 2003)

Although this headline does not give a full picture of the storyline or how dyslexia is presented within it, it does present a certain rationale through which dyslexia may be understood. The headline suggests that there is a difference between a dyslexic person's brain and that of a non-dyslexic person. Although the words do not suggest that the difference is beneficial or detrimental, it does infer that there is a difference in brain ability. The article continues to explain the relevancy of the headline.

> *Reading problems including dyslexia appear to be linked to abnormal sound processing in the brain says Neuropsychology. Brain imaging techniques have shown that children with reading problems tend to have*

excessive right-brain activity and below normal left-side activity. (The Times 2003)

The use of the word 'abnormal' reinforces stereotypical attitudes towards differences in bodily functions as compared to 'normal' (Oliver 1991; Swain et al 2004). Thus, 'difference' in this instance signifies an 'abnormality' in brain function. Furthermore, the association of abnormal brain activity with reading problems continues to encourage the view that dyslexia is predominately a reading difficulty.

Headlines are also used to focus on topic areas. However, the headline can present a different focus than the actual storyline. Thus, this focus could misinform the reader of the main issue of concern (Van Dijk 1991). Barnes states that it is often difficult to arrive at a focus other than that suggested in the headline. As some readers may never read past the headlines, or only read the headlines and the opening paragraphs, they could provide a source of misinformation (Van Dijk 1991). One example of a change in focus is seen in the headline:

"Tackling dyslexia" (Godsland, Guardian 2002).

The reference to 'tackling' dyslexia assumes a need to deal with or overcome something that is problematic, in this instance 'dyslexia'. However, the article actually discusses what it refers to as a mother's 'courageous' effort to 'fight' against the 'educational system' in order to gain the support she feels she needs for her son who is dyslexic. Although the article is referring to social barriers which are preventing her son from acquiring the support he needs to learn, the reference to 'tackling dyslexia' infers a requirement to overcome

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dyslexia rather than any 'problems' within the educational system This, then, could reinforce perceptions of the primacy of overcoming or tackling an individual impairment rather than the social barrier, in this case, the educational system (Oliver 1991).

Articles that refer to dyslexia as a personal 'abnormality' (discussed in more detail in chapter one) associate it with the 'personal tragedy theory' (French and Swain 2004), also referred to as the 'medical model of disability' (Oliver 1991).

French and Swain (2004:35) state that this 'personal tragedy theory is infused throughout media representations of disability and disabling conditions.' They explain that this is done in a number of ways. One explanation is the reference to a personal abnormality in functions of the body, which contrasts with perceived 'normal' levels of physical and intellectual ability. 'Abnormality' then becomes associated with a personal 'tragedy' which the individual is condemned to suffer (French and Swain 2004). This view is then used to justify social intervention to provide a cure to 'normalise' the individual if at all possible (French and Swain 2004.35; Oliver 1991: Barnes et al 2002). The representation of dyslexia as warranting a cure is also seen within certain articles.

The need to 'cure' or 'control' dyslexia

The headline states: **Dyslexic cure?**

Van Dijk states that a headline's 'sensational' appearance also impacts on the use and tone of the text (Van Dijk 1991). In this instance, the headline with its question mark infers a cure is nearly, but not quite, there.

The article continued with:

> *DYSLEXIA may be reversible through an intensive regime of 100 hours' reading classes, claims a brain-scan study by Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh. A report in Neuropsychólgica says that 25 college students with dyslexia showed a big increase in brain activity in areas linked to reading after the intensive work. This activity strengthened in the following year as the students read more.* (Naish Times 2008- their use of capitals).

The claim for the *'reversibility'* of dyslexia through reading suggests that the condition may be 'overcome' or even prevented through reading. This rationale signifies once more that dyslexia is a reading difficulty. This then reinforces previous claims that 'curing the reading difficulty cures the dyslexia'. Moreover, in justifying the need for a cure, these representations imply that having dyslexia is detrimental to an individual's well-being.

Furthermore, the comment 'reading more' suggests that the individual's difficulty in reading might be due to a personal lack of a commitment to read. The remark that the harder one works at reading the more likely it is that reading ability improves suggests that if people with dyslexia find difficulty in reading, they are not working hard enough. Therefore, the connection between difficulties in reading and 'laziness', whilst not explicit, is assumed (French and Swain 2004).

However, articles did not just advocate reading practice as a 'cure' for dyslexia: other 'experts' referred to scientific breakthroughs. For example:

'Eating fish oil may prove to be an effective remedy for dyslexia' (Dr ToMurcott Times 2003)

Eat fish regularly, it's full of omega-3 fatty acids and very good for helping our youngsters with hyper-activity or dyslexia (Scheving 2008)

'Tickling the nerve paths with a paintbrush sounds an unlikely treatment for children with dyslexia and similar problems, but the results can be excellent' (Staples Times 2000a)

These claims for a 'remedy' or 'treatment', and the language used, further the idea of dyslexia as an infliction in need of a 'cure'. It is interesting to see the importance many articles attach to 'expert' knowledge to substantiate their claims within the discourse of dyslexia as a health-related problem. This determination to 'cure' insinuates a form of regulation based on a comparison with the healthy or mentally able. Foucault argues that the body is 'normalised' through regulation and control (2004).

Thus the body is a socially constructed entity, contextualised and 'normalised' through 'governmentality' in which 'governmentality' *'refers to the development of micro-systems of social regulation that exercise normative control over individuals and populations'* (Turner 2001a:253[3]). In this instance, media is the micro-system presenting 'experts' assertions for control through its insistence for a cure. The article's insistence on remedies and treatments to 'cure' dyslexia reinforces these arguments. However, logic dictates that being identified as different assumes an individual 'desire' to be 'cured' from such a distinction

Therefore, although these claims suggest that should individuals take such remedies their condition will be alleviated, it also implies that refraining from the treatment is tantamount to personal blame (French and Swain2004). Thomas found that media often associated blame with an inability to achieve a state of well-being appropriate to the 'norm', He states.

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[3] Handbook of disability studies check

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> *Participants described an increasing 'culture of blame' against people living with obesity perpetuated by media and public health messages* (Thomas 2008)

The perpetuation of the idea that 'treatment' and 'cure' is essential, necessitates individuals to acknowledge the value of the 'cure' even though they may feel it wholly inappropriate.

'Suffering' with Dyslexia

The articles also referred to 'the personal tragedy' of having the condition. One example of this is seen in the report on the benefits of fish oil. The article stated:

> *Dr Richardson's research is based on the premise that people with dyslexia and related conditions may be deficient in essential fatty acids, which are important for proper brain function, possibly because of a dependence on heavily processed foods or a failure in some people to metabolise them properly.*

> *Intriguingly, Dr Richardson reported promising results from trials among schoolchildren suffering from dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), who had taken nutritional fish oil supplements.*
> (Turton Times 2003a).

It is interesting to see that the article also refers to the benefits of fish oil for people with dyslexia. However, in this instance the reference is describing children who have dyslexia as 'suffering from' the condition. Such emotive language encourages the audience to feel 'pity' for those having dyslexia. Barnes (1992a) argues that the media uses emotive words to present people termed 'disabled' as 'victims' or 'sufferers. Reinforcing feelings of pity generated within the non-disabled community projects the individuals as less than normal in their ability. Barnes states that emotive language used within the media continues to inform stereotypes. Thus, the concept of 'suffering' affirms the ironic suggestion that people can be 'happy' or enjoy their lives if they have these conditions.

Therefore, the reference to 'suffering from' reinforces the concept that dyslexia is a feature which is inflicted upon people. This premise that a condition can impact detrimentally on individual ability and life-experience is referred to within the 'personal tragedy theory' or medical model of disability, in which the social intervention of a cure is justified because people are presented as 'suffering' from their condition (French and Swain 2004).

Dyslexia as 'Disability' or 'abnormality'

Some articles make a definite link between disabled people and dyslexia. An example is seen in a headline which explicitly refers to terms relating to disability and then relates these terms to dyslexia in the main text:

> How the handicapped can tune-in to hi-tech benefits (Turner, The Times 2000).

Van Dijk states that the specific style of writing and formation of words used in headlines has important 'textual and cognitive functions' (Van Dijk 1991.50). In this reference, the term handicapped presents the reader with a specific language with which to understand the topic. Thus, although the report is acknowledging devices which can aid certain people, the language invites a specific interpretation of the contents of the article (Van Dijk 1991:50).

> As every newsreader knows, [headlines] are the most conspicuous part of a news report...[These are] used to activate the relevant knowledge in memory the reader needs to understand the news report (Van Dijk 1991:50)

In this headline, whilst the use of the eye-catching 'tune- in to hi-tech' implies a reference to technology, the term 'handicapped' identifies the people who will benefit from it. Theorists of disability have argued that the description of 'handicapped' infers negative images of the people it refers to. It is argued that this term has been represented as a metaphor which prompts the audience to assess the people as 'abnormal'. (Barnes 1992a). As the report continues it suggests that people with dyslexia will benefit from the new technology, therefore associating dyslexia with abnormality. The reference in the headline to 'handicapped' impresses on the reader that 'the handicapped' include people with dyslexia. Therefore, whilst the article is presenting a device which might aid people with dyslexia in certain tasks, the language and context of the article present negative images of dyslexia in terms of abnormality and disability.

The culture of fear and its correlation with dyslexia

Strategies used to justify and describe a requirement for cure or control are presented within images of behaviour deviancy. Barnes states that the continual use of these 'negative' images[s] of disabled people' perpetuates an oppressive attitude amongst the 'general public' towards people with this label (Barnes 1992a:203).

One example of this association is seen in an article asserting that there is a 'cure' for dyslexia through a "revolutionary exercise programme'. The Guardian reported 'Academics hail success of dyslexia treatment' (Meikle Guardian 2002); and The Times referred to it as 'How a wobble helps dyslexic pupils to be better readers' (Frean Times 2004). The Guardian went on to state that two

university researchers had said that those being treated *"showed 'significantly greater improvements' than others in dexterity, reading and verbal fluency"* (*Meikle* Guardian 2002).

The article in the Guardian went on to quote:

> *A revolutionary exercise programme for children and adults with dyslexia and similar learning difficulties was hailed as a major breakthrough last night, as academics said the therapy was working.*
>
> *Mr Dore says the results suggested that after treatment children showed a three-fold improvement in reading tests, a five-fold improvement in comprehension and a 17-fold improvement in Sats writing.*
>
> *Mr Dore said "I am sure this is a dream and someone is going to pinch me and wake me up. This has tremendous implications, particularly if you look at the correlation between crime and people with learning difficulties and unemployment and those with learning difficulties."*
>
> *David Reynolds of Exeter University, and Rod Nicolson of Sheffield University, who monitored the progress of 35 children in the West Midlands, said those who had undergone the treatment showed "significantly greater improvements" than others in dexterity, reading and verbal fluency.*

The first point to make is the correlation the article makes between anti-social behaviour and dyslexia. Although the main topic deals with an exercise programme which will aid people with dyslexia, the reader becomes aware that Dr Dore associates learning difficulties with dyslexia. However, the reader is also made aware of the correlation between crime, unemployment and dyslexia. The report, legitimised through the use of the 'expert' voice of 'academics', suggests that the exercise regime, while benefiting people with dyslexia, might also decrease the criminal and unemployment rates. Whilst this correlation is supported from studies of prisons where it was found a high percentage of inmates were dyslexic, this does not mean that there is a causal link between dyslexia and anti-social behaviour (Reid and Kirk 2001). Reid and Kirk (2001:120) argue that:

*If that pattern of behaviour was established it would not prove that dyslexia **caused** people to become delinquent: it would suggest that, if dyslexia is not carefully diagnosed and proper support provided, social disaffections might result (their use of bold).*

Therefore, whilst there is some evidence to suggest that a higher percentage of inmates within our prisons have dyslexia (Osmond 1995), this does not mean that their criminal status is a result of having the condition (Reid and Kirk 2001). However, the insinuation that deviant behaviour is a by-product of dyslexia enforces the fear that such causation exists. The report's reference to how 'curing' children of their dyslexia will have 'tremendous implications' for 'crime' and unemployment implies not only a correlation between the two issues but a causal effect. That is to say, this article implies that without children's access to the programme children who are dyslexic are more likely to resort to anti-social behaviour.

Furthermore, the article also links dyslexia to unemployment. Again the connection between these two subjects is implied. However, such implications ignore research which associates dyslexia with entrepreneurship. A survey commissioned by BBC2 for Mind of a Millionaire found evidence that 40 per cent of entrepreneurs are likely to be dyslexic, four times the national average (BBC 2003). This evidence would signify that, contrary to the insinuations of the report, whilst the learning aptitude of a person with dyslexia may be different from those without this condition, this does not signify they have an inability to learn.

The media has often been seen to project the more 'sensational' storylines in order to gain readership. Seale (2002) states that the newspapers present

many stories which rely on aspects of fear to establish a more newsworthy storyline. He found these news items generally focused on crime and aspects of violence, which often 'provided the major context for such stories' (Seale 2002:68). Thus, when presenting these correlations in 'sensational' terms such as the association between dyslexia and crime the 'struggle' becomes tangible and, consequently, understood universally as leading to deviant behaviour

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Another example which discussed more serious deviant behaviours and their association with dyslexia is seen in an article in The Sun which states:

Teen kill accused 'has ocd' (Abigail Rieley The Sun 2008).

The headline infers a connection between a killing and the condition 'ocd' As Oliver states 'readers would have to make an extra effort to derive an alternative main topic from the text' when they are presented with such a focus (Oliver 1991:51). The article focuses on a link with 'OCD' which it implies is linked to both dyslexia and murder. It states that:

> *A TEENAGER accused of stabbing another lad to death suffers from obsessive compulsive disorder, a jury was told yesterday.*
>
> *Finn Colclough, 18, of Dublin, denies the murder of student Sean Nolan, also 18*
>
> *Speaking from Australia via a video link, Dr Paul O'Connell told the Central Criminal Court Colclough had been receiving treatment for a number of years for OCD, dyslexia and separation anxiety*
>
> *He had been prescribed Prozac and the anti-psychotic drug Risperidone but had been taken off all medication and treatment around six months before the incident as his doctors said he had improved.*
>
> *The jury also heard from State Pathologist Dr Marie Cassidy.*
>
> *She said Mr Nolan had two stab wounds to his chest which would have taken mild to moderate force to cause.*

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This article raises a number of concerns. The implication of a correlation between dyslexia and the criminal act is presented in such a way as to imply a causal link between dyslexia and the crime. This is seen in the reference to all three conditions which it stated Finn needed 'treatment' for. This infers an association between dyslexia and treatment. The removal of this treatment 'six months before' the crime further implies that this removal had an impact on his antisocial behaviour. The implication is then that the removal of the 'treatment' had a direct bearing on his behaviour. Because the treatment refers to dyslexia, it implies that there is a causal link between dyslexia and the crime. It also indicates the treatment is a form of social control and infers the removal of this control impacted on his subsequent deviant behaviour. This also, then, implies that social control is needed in the form of 'treatment' for people with dyslexia to 'prevent' anti-social behaviour.

Thomson states:

> *By examining how 'corporeal deviance' is a 'product of cultural rules' about 'able-bodiedness': Constructed as the embodiment of corporeal insufficiency and deviance, the physically disabled body becomes a repository for social anxieties about such troubling concerns as vulnerability, control and identity' (Thomson et al 1997; 6).*

Therefore, although the link between dyslexia and the crime is not expressed as a fact, the suggestion that this lack of control is caused by the condition is implicit. Ross (1997:675) in her study of media representations of disability states: 'the language and images which surround news reporting of disability and illness were highly criticized by viewers', evoking fear and anxiety among people. And, seemingly, the language chosen in this article correlates guilt, blame, fear and punishment with dyslexia. Barnes in his study of media representations of disabled people also found that 'newspaper articles

sensationalising the connection between intellectual impairments and criminality are common in both tabloids and the 'quality' papers. The overall message . is that such people cannot be trusted ..and should be 'locked up' (Barnes 1992a:11).

A Summary

The findings of the chapter so far demonstrate how dyslexia is often portrayed by the media as an individual 'burden'. The alleviation of this 'burden' requires a 'cure' or 'treatment' which is regarded as a social task. Moreover, the responsibility rests with the individual to accept the 'cure' (Rose 1997).

The notion that social intervention is necessary is reinforced through a correlation between people with dyslexia and antisocial tendencies within the medical model of disability, in which dyslexia is viewed as an impediment requiring the social intervention of 'care' and 'control'.

In conclusion, these newspaper reports imply an inability to learn, a difficulty in many literacy skills and a lack of control or deviant behaviour in people with this condition and this enables society to feel justified in looking for a cure for dyslexia.

Dyslexic impact on social amenities

Articles also referred to the social barriers which were impeding the learning of children with dyslexia. However, some articles did so at the expense of the child rather than society.

This example states:

Schools budget strained by rise in special needs' (O'Leary, The Times 2000).

This headline implies that the problem of increasing numbers of children known as 'special needs' is straining school finances. The report continues:

> *Almost twice as many pupils as a decade ago are classified as having special needs, which range from physical handicaps to behavioural problems and learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. One child in five either has a formal statement of need or is registered by their school.*
>
> *John Marks, director of the Educational Research Trust and an assessment adviser under the Conservative Government, asks in a report published today: "Are there really twice as many children who need special help at school as there were a few years ago?" Dr Marks says that the criteria for assessing special educational needs (SEN) are vague and there is no accurate assessment of how much is spent on coping with them. He estimates that the figure is more than Pounds 7billion in a total education budget of about Pounds 20billion, although the Government says this is an exaggeration.*
>
> *The report, published by the Centre for Policy Studies, a right-wing think-tank, contends that a national inquiry is needed to establish the precise scale of special needs and the "use - or misuse - of resources".*

(O'Leary The Times 2000)

This article discusses the educational barriers which are affecting children with dyslexia. It suggests that these difficulties are due, in part, to the increasing number of children described as dyslexic and their financial impact on the education system rather than the education system not being aware of individual learning requirements.

The political voice of *'John Marks, director of the Educational Research Trust and an assessment adviser under the Conservative Government'* (O'Leary 2000) reinforces the credibility of the report. Further, the political voice projects certain modes of understanding of a topic or issue [4]. In this instance, it presents

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[4] please see Eldridge in his study of media representations of HIV/AIDS

the benefits of the allocation of resources to dyslexic children as a doubtful investment

The article then continues to address how to tackle these children's learning requirements. It states.

> Many people may recoil from a fundamental review of such a sensitive area of educational policy. But, given the present lack of clarity about what is happening and where all the money is going, it is surely time to ask some fundamental questions in the interests of all the pupils involved. In particular, should all these children be included in mainstream schools or should existing special schools be retained and developed? '(O'Leary, The Times 2000)

The language used exposes a specific impression of people represented within this group The question around the viability of removing 'special needs' children to 'special schools' is introduced as a culmination of all the problems discussed The addition of the reference to the interests of 'all the pupils' insinuates that those able to learn at the 'normal' pace are being impeded by those with differing learning requirements. This ignores the Warnock report which stated that mainstream schooling is better both for the disabled child and for non-disabled children alike (Davies cited in Swain et al 2004).

The question here though is one of segregation or social exclusion. Contemplating these solutions implies a willingness to consider a criterion of differing values and rights for children deemed within the 'special' label Thomas (2004:25) states that social exclusion:

> Is about people with impairment being made to feel of lesser value, worthless   social oppression [involves] the social imposition of restriction of activity on people with impairments and the socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional well-being.

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In this instance questioning the right of children with dyslexia to attend mainstream schools infers they have less right to attend and implies that a restriction on the individual's access to social amenities is acceptable. Such insinuations also ignore numerous reports which conclude that children termed as 'special needs' benefit from learning in a mainstream environment (Warnock report 1978). The Warnock report (1978) also claims that many children who go to special schools encounter numerous problems and on which the article fails to comment. The article goes on to validate the need for segregation:

> *Dr Marks traced the origins of the "explosion" to the Warnock Committee on handicapped children, which suggested in 1978 that up to 20 per cent of pupils had special needs.*
>
> *He says of the estimate, which is repeated in the current code of practice for assessing such needs: "This is one of the few educational targets which has now been reached and which is now in danger of being over-fulfilled."*

The reference to the target 'being in danger of' over filling the 20 % quota of pupils who have 'special needs' implies there is a level of children who will be presented within this label of 'special needs'. This infers that should the level be exceeded the problem must be the misrepresentation of children being allocated such a reference, rather than the suggestion that this 20% quota may be out of date.

This article projects a comprehensive argument for the removal of children labelled 'special needs' from mainstream schooling. The way the argument has been presented encourages speculation that the answer to these problems is one of segregation in order to benefit both 'normal' and 'special' pupils. Such a conclusion to an incomplete argument makes it difficult to gauge the oppression and discrimination in which these children have been represented. Barnes states that 'stereotypical assumptions about disabled people...are inherent in our culture and persist partly because they are constantly reproduced through

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the communications media' (Barnes 1992a:1). In this report the removal of children to special learning facilities appears a credible option due to the assumption that segregation of children to special schooling is acceptable for all children with different learning requirements.

The employability of people with dyslexia

The understanding that dyslexia can impact on learning is also presented within career opportunities of people who are dyslexic One example of the impact of dyslexia on career choices is seen in a woman's eulogy: she was remembered for her great riding and teaching skills. The report states:

> She was friends with pretty much everyone - she had a smile or a joke for everybody." Amanda Wilson, the BHTA's training secretary, said that Miss Johnson was one of 65 leading riders qualified to teach novices
>
> "She was a great person, always very keen to help young people. Everyone in the sport is desperate to get this safety issue sorted out. It is a ghastly thing to say, but it could have happened to anyone. People know that it is a risky sport."
> 'Miss Johnson began competing in eventing after her hopes of becoming a vet were ended by dyslexia" (Lee Times 2000)

This account refers to Miss Johnson's change of career plans as her 'hopes' of becoming a vet were shattered because of her dyslexia. This implies that her dyslexia prevented her from achieving this skill or level of academic learning Newspaper reports of individual life stories often present the individuals as achievers To make the storyline appear more 'sensational' these reports present the achievement as even more special because of some form of adversity. In this instance Miss Johnson's 'adversity' appears to be the dyslexia which prevented her 'hopes' of becoming a vet from being a reality. It is interesting to note that the article's language lends to Miss Johnson's

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achievements a triumphant tone. This enlightens the reader to how successful Miss Johnson had been in her career.

However, a more recent article which also referred to an individual who wanted to attain her career choices, is written in a less than positive manner. In this instance the reporter discusses his reaction to a woman who wanted to become a doctor.

It stated in its headline:

This is not discrimination. It's weeding out.
The report continues:

> *Stephen Pollard won't be treated by a dyslexic doctor*
>
> *Here's my problem: I love flying. I get a huge thrill at that moment when an aircraft accelerates on the runway and starts to take off. And so, since I've been a child, I've wanted to learn to fly.*
>
> *But I can't. I have an unusual eye problem, one of the effects of which is that I do not have 3-D vision. So I'll never be allowed to fly an aircraft, because under Civil Aviation Authority rules my eye condition bars me from getting a pilot's licence.*
>
> *I've always reasoned that although it's unfortunate that fate has determined that I will never wear a pilot's wings, the CAA must know what is and isn't necessary to fly safely, and if 3-D vision is needed, it's clearly sensible that it bans people like me from piloting aircraft. So instead of flying jumbo jets I do what my body will allow me to do and write for The Times. I've managed to live with the disappointment.*
>
> *But a 21-year-old medical student, Naomi Gadian, takes a different view. Ms Gadian is dyslexic and is suing the General Medical Council because it uses multiple-choice tests as part of its qualification procedures. As a dyslexic, she finds them difficult. And she says that this means she is being discriminated against.*
>
> *Forgive me, Ms Gadian, but you're missing the point. You're not being discriminated against. You're being weeded out. It's quite deliberate. If you can't read or write sufficiently well to pass a multiple-choice test, you shouldn't be a doctor.*
>
> (Pollard 2008 The Times)

The significance of this report is twofold. First, the language and 'tone' insinuate that Naomi's academic learning is flawed due to her dyslexia. Evidence of this is seen in the analogy of Stephen's inability to fly due to a medical condition and

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Naomi's inability to become a doctor due to her dyslexia This comparison of the two conditions as medical and the inference that their inability to achieve their goals is due to personal health problems demonstrates that Stephen views dyslexia within a medical model agenda. Thus, it is dyslexia which impedes or restricts her achievement and not the teaching environment.

The comment that Stephan 'won't be treated by a dyslexic doctor' further insinuates that the ability of an individual with dyslexia to acquire the relevant levels of learning to become a doctor is suspect This is further reinforced by the comment made that any difficulty passing tests should be seen as a form of 'weeding out' of those considered unable to achieve the 'doctor' status. Fairclough (1995) argues that language is a political tool in which people can be referenced by derogatory characteristics, and which impact on individuals understanding of both themselves and others. Researchers have argued that the terminology used within the media concerning disabled people has a powerful and often debilitating impact on the person's identity (Barnes 1992; Corker and French 1999).

> *Worldwide, people with disabilities experience invasion of the disability identity through the practices of labelling and hegemonic language usage detrimental to their images (Peters in Corker, 1999:103)*

It would seem that the language and value placed on dyslexia has impacted on Stephen's view of both the condition and the people described as such to such an extent that it has affected his capacity to rely on the competence of a doctor described as dyslexic.

It is also interesting to note that this story was perceived newsworthy by a number of other newspapers, including The Mirror 2008, The Observer 2008,

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The Mail on Sunday 2008, the Telegraph 2008 and the Times 2008[5], although, not The Sun. The remarks included were similar to Steven's, although some argued that having dyslexia does not automatically mean an inability to learn. However, these references to people with dyslexia reinforce social expectations of learning impediments related to the condition. In this article the reader is left in no doubt from the tone of the report that Stephen feels the idea of a person with dyslexia achieving such skills is 'preposterous'.

The correlation between the dyslexic condition and a loss of career choice because of stereotypical assumptions about the condition is also discussed by McLaughlin (2004). He found that workers with dyslexia are often discriminated against by their work colleagues who had preconceived and often negative expectations of people with this condition. This study concluded that given such views many people with dyslexia were more inclined to hide or refrain from letting others know of their condition for fear of ridicule, and to hide such conditions from employers for fear that it would interfere with their prospects of promotion. It would seem that Stephen is stating in this article that the inability to succeed in certain learning criteria is not due to any teaching methods, but solely to the student's inability to learn because she was dyslexic. We can see from the ridicule presented in the report above that such fears are significant (McLaughlin 2004).

The social barriers which constrain people with dyslexia

Not all articles cite the dyslexic condition as a 'burden', some articles also highlight social-barriers. These usually consist of references to the lack of support children with dyslexia receive within their schools. Although it must be

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[5]and letters were also written into the Times newspaper on this subject

acknowledged that such references presented less than 1% of the articles, it should be recognised that such references were present. One example included·

Minister leads calls for more provision for dyslexic pupils

(Curtis 2008, The Guardian).

The government has ordered a review of how schools should educate the country's estimated 300,000 dyslexic children, after admitting that many are being left to flounder without tailored teaching

The schools secretary, Ed Balls, said he wanted to disprove sceptics who questioned the existence of dyslexia, but too many parents were not getting the help their children needed to learn to read.

The review will be led by Sir Jim Rose, who is undertaking a separate review of the primary curriculum It will address calls for national screening to ensure that children with literacy problems do not slip through the net, Balls said.

It is evident that this article is reporting on the difficulty of educating children with dyslexia in the most appropriate manner, due to social barriers. The reference to a lack of 'tailored teaching' and the requirement for help for parents to enable their children to read, all suggests social impediments are preventing children learning and that it is not a personal inability to learn Furthermore, Ed Balls's reference to disproving the 'sceptics who question the existence of dyslexia' enforces the justification of the label and the credibility of the condition. This is further evidenced in the reference to children left to flounder because of inadequate teaching. This article is in complete contrast to the previous one which claimed that the strain of teaching children with dyslexia is due to the increased number of students requiring support In this instance, this article locates the barriers which are impeding the learning of children who are dyslexic firmly within the lack of relevant social facilities.

Some storylines which also discussed social barriers focused on employers' views of dyslexia. One example is seen in this reference to legal requirements:

'How *the disabled struggle to overcome workplace prejudice'* (MacDonald, Times 2003a).

ONLY 3 per cent of disabled people were born with a disability and fewer than 5 per cent of disabled people use wheelchairs. These statistics come from Motability, a charity that provides suitable cars to rent for disabled people.

People with disabilities that may not be obvious, such as a chronic illness or dyslexia, have difficulty finding work because for. many employers, says Nancy Stangar of the Blue Arrow employment agency, they do not have a disability - and therefore a firm cannot be accused of discrimination by rejecting them for jobs....

...Nancy Stangar says: "When the tougher Disability and Discrimination Act comes into force next year discrimination of any description will not be allowed. By October 2004 employers will have to take the best person for the job, and if they are disabled adapt their workplace to accommodate them. The ramifications of this will be huge."

Together with Motability, she is holding a series of breakfast seminars to educate clients on what is in store. "Most say they are shocked by their lack of knowledge and understanding of those with disabilities and that they could be discriminating against them."

Education is needed. Motability's statistics also show that of the 8.6 million people with disabilities in the UK, 6.9 million are of working age - and of those only 3.3 million have jobs. Its human resources director, Barbara Hanant, Motability's, says there is a need to break down misplaced assumptions, allowing employers to see people's abilities rather than their disabilities.

It could be argued that this article presents mixed messages for people with dyslexia. The headline, with its reference to 'the disabled,' has particular connotations. Theorists have argued that such references to disabled people as 'the disabled' objectify the meaning of the reference. Barnes states that such terms are value laden and encourage a stereotypical interpretation of the term relating it to abnormality and lack of ability (Barnes et al 1999). Barnes (1999:20) argues that using such phrases as 'the disabled' and 'dyslexic' 'tends to dehumanise and objectify disabled people' and it is 'also offensive to label

someone by their impairment'. It implies that the person is only representative of their condition and if social awareness of that condition is 'unconstructive' the individual will continue to be seen within such detrimental constructs.

However, the reference to employers' discriminatory attitudes and not to a personal inability to do the work suggests another more social reason for some people's difficulties in finding employment It is also interesting to see how shocked some employers are that they were not aware they could be discriminating against people with dyslexia as they do not consider dyslexia to be a disability. This misunderstanding reflects the issues arising from the tendency of individuals to refer to dyslexia within certain oppressive terms because of the difficulty of equating dyslexia with a disabling condition. This is further evidenced in the statement that many employers feel they cannot be discriminating if they reject a person with dyslexia from a job because of their condition. The feeling that rejecting people with dyslexia from these positions is acceptable because they are not seen to have a disability also correlates to the view that using dyslexia to denote general concepts of inability is acceptable

The unemployment figures in the article are indicative of the 'misplaced assumption' which prevents employers recognising the abilities of people with dyslexia. This is important as it shifts any blame from the individual with dyslexia to individuals in authority and emphasizes the need for 'understanding' not 'cure' This supports the view that social attitudes impede disabled people in their attempts to gain equal working opportunities and not personal inability. Campaigners of the social model of disability might argue that by presenting disabled people as a homogenous group, they can retaliate to such social

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barriers using a political stance which enables change in policy to impact on the employment of people with dyslexia.

Personal Accounts of Dyslexia

The presentation of individuals within the articles is influenced by language. This in turn impacts upon the reader's understanding of the individual's experiences.

However, as above, some articles registered the impact of social barriers on an individual's abilities. Individuals were quoted directly and the individual voices presented personal understandings of being dyslexic and reflections of their experiences. In one example we hear Caroline's account. She is reported as saying:

> *Far from being dismayed by such a diagnosis, Caroline was delighted. "It was a great weight off my shoulders. When I failed my 'A'-levels and people around me were getting really good grades I thought I must be stupid."* (Turton Sunday Times 2003).

We can see from Caroline's view that being labelled dyslexic has been beneficial. The correlation between benefit and her feelings of stupidity at failing 'A' levels implies that her assessment of her ability had been modified by failure. That these feelings of failure had been overturned when she was diagnosed as dyslexic implies that she associates this condition with a form of relief. This relief is further evidenced in her reference to the 'great weight' being lifted from her shoulders at the news. This would indicate that Caroline does not register dyslexia as a negative identifying label. The relief she feels is not only because she has a reason for her failure, but also because she does not feel

'stupid' It is also interesting to see the reporter's response to her feelings of 'joy'. When she states that 'Far from being dismayed. Caroline was delighted', she registers surprise that Caroline could feel relief at being diagnosed, implying that this response was not expected

A further article also discusses a personal opinion given by Pete, who also has an optimistic outlook on his condition He states:

> Dyslexia has been key to my success. I left school without an 'O' level, but I knew I could do more than most kids. I've always been able to think outside the box.
> (O'Brien 2008 The Times).

It is interesting to see how different these reactions to the diagnosis are compared to Caroline's The remark about his lack of 'O' Levels is ignored to a certain extent because of his belief that he was better 'than most kids' His reference to being able to do more than other kids shows his confidence in his own ability. This is reinforced by his reference to being able to 'think outside the box' That he connects his benefits in ability to his dyslexia is evident in these statements.

Furthermore, the language and tone of voice used are authoritative. Barnes et al (1999) state that media representations of men's experiences are often presented using phrases and language denoting more authority and control; at times describing men as heroes overcoming obstacles to attain success The language and voice used in this article in the three short sentences present a voice of authority culminating in the phrase 'dyslexia is the key to my success' It is clear this individual is very sure of the source of his success. Like Caroline, he describes a sense of pleasure at having this condition. However, the confidence and certainty he equates with his ability, and the relationship he has developed with his dyslexia is different to Caroline's Her relief is a result of not

feeling personally responsible for being unable to reach certain levels of learning.

However, some articles refer to an individual's dyslexia as a difficulty and refer to the individual suffering from or struggling against the condition. One example is seen in the discussion of Keria Knightley's dyslexia. It states:

> Before she found success Keira's childhood was far from idyllic. She suffers from dyslexia and found life at school difficult. She recalls: "I kept my head down in classes, I was very quiet. I had a few friends but not many.
>
> "I certainly wasn't one of the popular people. When I was very little, kids called me stupid because I couldn't read well."But it's amazing what a child calling you stupid will do to make you read pretty quickly.
>
> "Now, reading's kind of fine but my spelling is horrible. Writing notes to people is always embarrassing. I wasn't happy in school, partly because I wanted to do something else.
>
> "It was nobody's fault, nobody was horrible to me or anything like that. I was just absolutely not happy being there."I was lucky enough to have an escape route -acting. Many kids aren't so lucky and many are very unhappy. (Knight The Sun 2004).

It is interesting to see that the reporter refers to Keira as 'suffering' from dyslexia, and her school life 'difficult'. However, Keira does not refer to 'suffering' with dyslexia but relates her misery to interactions with others and the schooling environment. These references could be due to the need for newspapers to discuss the achievements of individuals through personal adversity in order to sensationalise the report.

This was also seen in other personal accounts of how dyslexia had impacted on personal experience. As before, the storylines appear to be consistent with people considered to have 'succeeded' in some areas of their lives. Once more, these examples of succeeding were projected through overcoming some kind of adversity. David Bailey registers his time at school as one such adverse experience. He states:

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"It *was the worst time in my life...I hated teachers. Don't tell me all teachers are great because all the ones I had were arseholes and they treated me like shit. You know, they could destroy you if you were dyslexic, those people, by taking away everything".* (Dougary Sunday Times 2003).

Fitzgerald, a poet, recalls:

"After one run-in I went home with his initials from his leather strap imprinted on my back. He dismissed my inability to spell as stupidity" (Drinkwater Times 2000).

And Kelly Osbourne writes in her column:

"When I was 15, all anyone had to say was something as petty as, 'You're stupid'. I'm dyslexic and it would set me off all day".

"I got so angry because people in school did not really understand dyslexia. I felt sad because I would keep thinking about it, then mad at myself for not dealing with it in a more appropriate manner" (Osbourne, The Sun 2008).

The effect of these experiences on the lives of these individuals is plain to see However, it is important to note that these personal accounts often did not refer to their dyslexia as an impediment to their learning. The individuals often referred to social barriers which impacted on their lives and their experiences.

The language and terminology used by both men and women in these articles are important as they correlate individual experience with individual perception of dyslexia. Furthermore, the newspapers' references and the language used to portray their experiences could be described within discourses of gender. The comment from David Bailey that, 'they're arseholes' who could 'destroy you', and Fitzgerald's experience of the 'run in' with his teacher, highlight the language which registers the resistance and aggression used towards such experiences. This language reflects how conditions deemed to be disabling are often portrayed within media as requiring an 'heroic effort' by disabled men to struggle or fight against adversity (Robertson 2004 79).

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In contrast the women are presented with less reference to physical actions or aggression. The reaction of Caroline at the delight of discovering she has dyslexia and the relief she gains rather than the stupidly she felt before and Kelly's sadness and annoyance suggest a more self-condemning approach to their abilities.

However, even though both the men's and the women's accounts might have appeared different to a certain extent, they identified through their personal accounts social barriers rather than a personal inability in their learning or in achieving certain goals. The aggression the men directed at their schools' and teachers' actions infers that it was the teachers' reactions to their dyslexia which had impeded their learning not any inability on their part. Furthermore, Kelly's anger is focused on the fact that 'people' relate her differences to 'stupidity' not dyslexia which also implies that she does not see her difficulties as a personal inability.

The fact these storylines are mainly discussed through past difficulties to present achievements suggests that people with dyslexia can also be achievers.

The Conclusion

This chapter explored newspaper articles which referred to dyslexia as a difference. The chapter explored four areas in which this 'difference' had been qualified. First, it questioned the usage of the term as a general meaning to describe forms of inability or ineptitude. Second, the study explored the dominant discourses of dyslexia as inferring an inability to read and write. Such references to an abnormality in specific functions were also identified within the comments which compared intellectual ability. Third, it explored how the verification of dyslexia as a malfunction could be argued to justify the 'need' for

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social intervention in the form of a 'cure'. Forth, the justifications for a 'cure' were also seen in the correlations between dyslexia and crime

However, the chapter also explored the references to personal accounts which occurred within some articles. It discussed how some of these articles had presented social barriers as the impediment to an individual's expectations or ability to achieve. It further found that individuals who have dyslexia also inferred that social impediments rather than personal inability had impeded their learning.

CHAPTER 5- STUDENT NARRATIVES AND HOW THEIR DYSLEXIA INFORMS THEIR IDENITITY

This thesis has explored how the identity of a person who is described as dyslexic is influenced by a number of factors, not least social values, 'norms' and structures. It has been highlighted tin this thesis how social effects, whilst not definitive, can impact on social and individual awareness of the features of the condition. These effects are manifest within such institutions as education, health and the policies which inform these institutions. It has been further acknowledged in this research that social conceptions of the abilities of individuals with this condition could have an influence on those individuals in such areas as their education and employment and their general concepts of 'self-worth'.

This chapter highlights how some individuals with dyslexia experience and understand their condition in such a way that it has influenced their thoughts of themselves and their abilities, which at times appear outside social perceptions or inferences. As the previous chapter hinted, some aspects of having dyslexia appear to be perceived as more beneficial by some individuals with dyslexia than legal or social accreditation would have it. Thus, this chapter will discuss how some individuals have sought to make sense of their 'sense of self' and its assimilation within social settings where alternative views are presented by social or public perceptions. This includes an ability to dismiss categorizations that imply individuals with dyslexia do not have particular abilities that the individual is well aware they do have. Within these discussions it can be noted that experiences differ, in some respects, depending on whether the participant is a children, men or women or in some cases whether they had been formally

diagnosed as dyslexic or not. Thus, I contend that investigating 'difference' within constructs of gender will indicate how some 'participants' were influenced in their understanding of their dyslexia both as a personal condition and as officially labelled. This is presented in their opinions on exposing or not their condition to society, the benefits or hindrance of having a label, how some individuals may re-form their understanding of this or question their own understanding of society's perceptions of the term 'disability' when considering their identity with dyslexia as a disabling one.

Consequently, this analysis involves semi-structured interviews with 14 students who describe themselves as dyslexic and attend universities in Devon. It discusses the respondents' experiences and perceptions of themselves and their ability, which in turn relates to their capacity to function within social and institutional settings. Whilst it would be highly improper to make any generalisations from such a study, I believe that highlighting the respondents' understandings of themselves, in particular how they re-form social expectations of their abilities through adapting these notions to their own perceptions of themselves as learners, does aid society's knowledge of living with this condition However, it is important to state that it is the individual's understanding of his/her own dyslexia that is the focus of this investigation and not the understanding of dyslexia as a concept

I have explored these issues using a discourse analysis to achieve a 'richer and deeper' insight along with reference to some qualitative differences in experience Using discourse analysis will enable an exploration into the differences manifest in the participants' accounts and expressed within particular language, and the references to particular experiences and use of narratives of control which at times appear to be gendered.

In order to discuss these issues, this chapter explores the respondents' understanding of their identity with reflections of their school experiences which will demonstrate how official labelling manages to infer an identity, both as a form of official recognition and as a construct of difference in ability. This entails an exploration of the participants' experiences in this period and their views of the control exercised by certain authorities and how this played a part in their formulation of their identity as a person with dyslexia. Thus, this chapter explores how some individuals perceive that exposing their condition to society can be both a benefit and a hindrance and how conceptions of public awareness have informed how they define their abilities within the public label of dyslexia and as a private condition. The chapter concludes with an overview of the participants' experiences and thought processes on the re-forming of their identity with this condition.

Participants' reflections of childhood experiences and how these influenced their understanding of the term, 'Dyslexia'

It is interesting to see how some participants registered their reflections of their school experiences as both a detrimental experience to their learning and on occasion as a preventative measure in resisting the classification of their difficulties made by those in authority. One example of this is seen in John's judgement that others will suspect him of being unable to 'do the work' which may be a result of, in certain respects, his reflections of his school experiences.

As he explains:

> School for me was a complete nightmare. A complete waste of my time, I was excluded from most classes – we think it is going to be too difficult for you. Not the fact that, do you want to get challenged?

> *Well, yes please, I always wanted to be challenged, so teach me, I don't want to be labelled and put into a room where I am sitting with people who don't give a monkeys*
>
> *I was always interested in learning but never allowed.*

In his frustration his behaviour became more aggressive He continues·

> *I moved down from London when I was 7 always very angry, very frustrated, frustration was an everyday occurrence. I did things like bang my head against a wall, punching things just to relieve my frustration   They knew something was wrong and I was statemented [as dyslexic] by the age of 10 or 11.*
>
> *I think I became aware of what it was, not understanding it, it was a name, when I was 11*
>
> *I had no idea of why everybody else could do something and I couldn't. I could reel off millions of stories about what teachers did and what pupils did and how bad I felt. .I could real off as many stories as you like – none of them very nice....at 11 I went to a centre ...it was a school for disturbed kids. They wanted to label me....*

We can see from John's reflections that he is still angry at the treatment he received during his school years His frustration at the lack of teaching support, the exclusion from classrooms and his segregation, the reference to millions of stories about his experiences with teachers and pupils, which were 'not very nice', is an   example of the difficulties he experienced with the people in authority

However, the most interesting point here is his aversion to being labelled and his observation that to him 'it was a name' It suggests that John saw the label, 'dyslexia,' as the metaphoric stick which those in authority used to beat him. In other words, the label presented the educational system with a justification for their treatment of John; and in certain respects for their attempts to control him However, we can also tell by his actions that John resisted and struggled against this. This is reinforced by a further statement in which he tells of how he came to terms with his understanding of the term dyslexia in later life He states

In all honesty it never meant anything to me. I just had a label that's all it was. It never meant anything to me until I got into my adult years then I became aware of what exactly this was. Then it became more of an interest as well as fighting against certain learning as compared to everyone else.

Thus, even though the school tried to control John through non-challenging school work and by segregating him to a special unit and excluding him from classroom situations, John reacts against these forms of control often through sustained, violent and aggressive behaviour. It would be reasoned that aggressive behaviour will be sanctioned as the result of an adolescent boyish attitude. Francis (2000) studied the behaviour of boys at school and suggests they are more likely to resort to aggression within classroom situations to appease frustration. Archer and Westman (1981) found that social expectations encourage boys to behave more assertively and, at times, in a more confrontational manner than girls within school environments.

Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) suggest the confidence he shows in the aggressive way he refuses to bow to the control exercised by certain authorities and his ability to explore and reform an identity when he has more control over his situation and his fight against certain normative learning patterns could be formulated within discourses of gender. They claim such resistance is often considered attributable to male behaviour and, therefore, understandable and in this context more acceptable. This may be how John is able to exhibit a form of understanding which not only enables him to explore a meaning of dyslexia which is 'other' or outside conventional authoritative views or social expectations of the abilities of those labelled dyslexic and how it may apply to his identity, but also enables him to 'fight' against what he considers restrictive forms of learning. Thus, it could be said that John's use of aggression in certain situations has enabled him to delineate subsequent re-formations of his identity

throughout his life. His ability to resist some forms of social control as a child might have enabled him to continue to resist and re-form his identity with this condition as an adult.

Furthermore, although John did not appear to gain by his continual aggressive behaviour, it did not prevent him from continuing in such a manner Askew and Ross (1990) suggest that this form of aggression could also be a form of resistance to the control exercised by institutionalized authority Even when incorporated within a special unit, John continued to struggle against his controlling environment This is seen in the way, even though he did receive attention from the school authorities in that they statemented him and removed him to a unit, their attentions did little to ease his frustrations or support his learning and, thus, his aggressive behaviour continued I contend that these continual aggressive acts could have stemmed from a gendered approach which John incorporated into the situations in the classroom. The more frustrated he became, the more aggressive his actions. Thus, such physical action, whilst not appeasing the situation, might have been a form of resistance he felt available to him at that time.

We can also see from John's narrative that not only does he struggle physically under his school's 'control', he also resists the 'official' view of his difficulties on a more personal level Examples of this are seen through his difficulties in learning, which he equates to a lack of correct teaching. This is further evidenced in his reference to never being 'allowed to learn' and never being 'challenged', and continues with his statement that labelling was a form of control which allowed those in authority to incarcerate him with children who did not want to learn.

However, it would seem that in his reflections of his behaviour as a child, John also presented more physical control techniques in certain situations. Banging his head against objects to relieve his frustration could be viewed as a form of personal control (albeit detrimental to his health) with which to express frustration at his situation. He inflicts one form of pain, over which he has control, to relieve another form of pain over which he has none[1]. John also exhibits some control over his acceptance of the dyslexic label. John's references to having no idea why he was unable to succeed and *'It never meant anything to me until I got into my adult years then I became aware of what exactly this was'* suggest that he had refused to see the label as anything other than a tool used by those in authority at the time.

It would appear that although he felt able to ignore or disown the label as a child, he was able to retain the knowledge that he had dyslexia for exploration at a later time. Thus, in some respects he was able to ignore the label on a public level, a tool used to beat him metaphorically as a child, but could also identify with the condition on a more private level in his understanding of his abilities.

Thus, whilst he chose to ignore the label as a child and did not connect it with his difficulties at school, he does not deny the fact that he has the condition. As Humphrey et al (2002:196) states, *'The developing of self as an entity...is continually being redefined on the basis of environmental experience'*. Thus, he is able to redefine his abilities in the light of his experiences of not being taught, in his eyes, correctly, and not through a personal inability to learn. This suggests that is why, when he does internalise his awareness of his dyslexia, he then goes on to use it as a means to 'fight' social expectations of ways of

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[1] Refer to Foucault's reference to power and control, the docile body and social control

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learning Subsequently, he uses his understanding of the label to inform his own identity, you could say as a consequence of being labelled with dyslexia as a child.

John was not the only male participant able to re-form an understanding of their abilities with dyslexia which was incompatible with the views of educational authorities However, Ben's perceptions are in complete contrast to John's in that he equates his difficulties in school to his dyslexia 'despite' his schools lack of formal accreditation He states that finding out he had dyslexia

> *was a very gradual process. First I am very mildly dyslexic - my dyslexia isn't totally incapacitating. But because of that it was a very gradual process*
>
> *When I was 5 or 6 I was put into a low class, they thought there was something wrong then and my spelling was particularly bad*
>
> *By 9 they were like- 'oh he can't spell', So probably I was 8 or 9 when my parents thought there is something wrong But the school did nothing about it, so I muddled through for quite a long time*
>
> *I eventually came out with 5 GCSE's I got D's in English but I did quite well in maths and the sciences*
>
> *I have a brother who is severely dyslexic and statemented... and my father is as well..*
>
> *I have short-term memory loss, I can't remember things from one minute to the next so that I do consider it to be a handicap definitely ..*

Comments such as *'something wrong'* and *'the school did nothing about it'* make it clear the authorities did not diagnose Ben as dyslexic. In his reference to the mildness of his dyslexia Ben presumes there are different levels of dyslexia This is reinforced when he says it is not 'totally incapacitating', which is the reason that he gives for only gradually realising he has the condition The descriptions 'very mild' and not 'totally incapacitating' would suggest that he does not envisage his dyslexia as a major problem in his ability to learn but that he does think it is dyslexia that he has This is further acknowledged by his

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comparison of his condition with the severity of his brother's. His comparison of the features of dyslexia demonstrates his perceptions of the condition.

His use of the term 'handicap' (with all its connotations) implies that he does not dismiss his condition as irrelevant. This is all the more interesting when taking into account that not only was Ben never officially diagnosed as dyslexic as a child but that he never sought or was never given an official diagnosis in adulthood either. That he is able to inform his own identity with this condition, in spite of the lack of acknowledgement from the school, is testament to his confidence in his ability to re-form an identity without official recognition.

Therefore, upon reflection, Ben is able to form an understanding of his differences, which he associates with dyslexia, (without official recognition or definition) even equating them to a personal 'handicap'. Such confidence in his ability is demonstrated in his intention to continue into Higher Education, even though he refers to a difficulty with his GCSEs. This is witnessed further in his comment about failing the first year of his degree.

He states:

> One of the first things my dad said to me when I came home from the first year at university and failed all my exams. He said oh well maybe you should try something less challenging instead. And I thought, you bastard, because you know there is an issue and you know I am not stupid.

That he has since gone on to take a Masters Degree, in spite of his initial failure, is further testimony to his strength of will and suggests that Ben has high expectations of himself and his ability.

Furthermore, his anger over the discrediting of his abilities by his father suggests he is upset at his father's failure to acknowledge that he has some 'issues' as he calls it; not that he failed within his first year. Furthermore, he

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does not view his failure as a personal lack of ability because he rejects out of hand his father's suggestion he should do something less challenging in order, as it were, to accommodate his ability. Additionally, his assertion that, '*he knows I am not stupid*' proves he does not think so either

This suggests that Ben, like John, considers his difficulties are not due to a personal inability to learn. Consequently, in spite of Ben's low level of academic achievement (both at GCSE and Degree level), lack of support and understanding from his father; and his personal acknowledgement of the 'handicap' of dyslexia, he is still assertive and confident in his ability to succeed in Higher Education.

Thus, continuing into higher education to study at postgraduate level, Ben sustains his belief in his abilities. His confidence in his ability, the assertive manner with which he informs his identity and then incorporates within it his condition without reference to official assessment and the anger he expresses at his father's lack of understanding, all suggest that Ben's perceptions of himself and his dyslexia may have been influenced, to a certain extent, by reflections on his experiences, but are not definitive of them. This is further evidenced by studies into academic achievement which have found that children, who strongly believe they are in control of their studies and learning, exhibit a higher level of confidence in their academic ability than children who feel their success or failure to be beyond their control (Burden 2005; Frederickson and Jacobs 2001). Once more it suggests that part of the reason for Ben's resistance and re-forming of his identity with dyslexia was his resistance as a boy to forms of control exercised by those in positions of authority In this instance, not only from those within teaching environments but also from family members

This is further evidenced if we explore the differences in some of the women's reflections of their school experiences. Pam's reflections of an official and the lack of an official label of dyslexia within her education led her not only to accept the first definition but also to then go on to doubt her own ability, and even though she also had personal experience of her brother's dyslexia and a 'feeling' that 'they' were wrong, this did not seem to make her feel able to ignore or go against their change of diagnosis.

Pam explains:

> *The way I was struggling through school sort of said to me yeah there is a problem. I wouldn't be surprised that part of it was the fact that when I was in Jersey, which is where I come from, my school over there until yr 4, we did little to no maths whatsoever. We would sit in the classroom playing with stickle bricks. So I think that's held me back a lot and then over here the teachers knew I was struggling they put it down to that, they didn't think maybe there's another reason for it.*

> *When I was at [senior] school I got put in the first set in English and God knows how I even did that. And I was just struggling the whole way through. The teachers didn't seem to recognise this, they thought it was being lazy [rather] than it was being dyslexic. And what I found absolutely appalling about that was that the school was actually set up for dyslexia. I had a test there and they originally said yes you are then they said oh no, you're not. After that I got completely confused and didn't know what they were going on about. So I came to university and still struggled to a certain level and now I have been diagnosed by the university and I am starting to get the help I need.*

When I asked her how she felt about being diagnosed as dyslexic and then having them change their minds, she said:

> *I got really annoyed because I knew, judging from both my dad and my brother who have dyslexia, although my brother is a lot severer than my dad is, that chances are I would have it... when the school said yes you're dyslexic and then no you are not. First I was relieved and then I got quite annoyed and thought ok maybe I am just completely thick. And I don't know what I am doing and that sort of thing.*

Even though, like Ben, Pam has a brother diagnosed as dyslexic, and she suspects she is dyslexic when she compares her abilities to her brother's, she was unable to resist or go against the official diagnosis of her condition.

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Even with the school's change of diagnosis, and her familiarity with the condition through family members, she does not remonstrate with their decision as John does, nor does she ignore the school's view and re-form her identity with dyslexia as Ben was able to do Consequently, her lack of opposition towards the control exercised by her school might, in some respects, be due to society's expectations of her behaviour Evidence for this lack of opposition is presented in Marchbank and Letherbey's (2007) study, which has shown that girls are much more likely to be passive and pliable to those in authority in schools.

The fact that she not only accepts the change of diagnosis, but also starts to doubt her own intelligence through her reference to not knowing what was going on and feeling completely 'thick', implies a certain lack of confidence. This is further evidenced in her lack of understanding of how she stayed in the top set for English and her remark on her continual struggle throughout her schooling. Humphreys (2005) associates difficulty with academia with an individual's lack of self-esteem and Riddick (1996) states that there is also evidence to suggest that children who are dyslexic are more likely to suffer from low self- esteem than are non-dyslexic children due to difficulties within school environments.

Although we cannot state that the two men have higher levels of self-esteem, we can see that Pam forms a link between her struggle with her schoolwork in English and her confidence in her abilities in this area of learning. This evidence suggests that the lack of diagnosis of her dyslexia as a child has impacted on her identity with this condition in adulthood Thomson (in Miles and Varma 1995·46) states:

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*the dyslexic child who fails to obtain crucial support in the early stages
may well succumb to levels of stress which he[she] can neither control
nor understand, which undermine motivation and shatter confidence.*

Burden reinforces this view and states that a 'distorted self-image will be particularly prevalent if the difficulty of dyslexia is not recognized at an early stage of schooling (Burden 2005:2). This would suggest that Pam at least is influenced by her school's interpretation of her difficulties which on reflection she felt had an effect on her confidence at that time.

However, I contend that Pam also exhibits a form of resistance to her school's perception of her 'inability'. Evidence of this resistance is perceived through her reflections that her school's teaching methods were the rationale for her difficulties in her learning. It is interesting to see that although her difficulties lay within her literacy skills and not her arithmetic skills, this does not deter her linking the school's lack in teaching maths to her difficulty in literacy.

Pam's references to her difficulties in learning may also be considered a result of the limitative effects of social barriers. Thus, in referring to difficulties outside of a personal inability she resists the view that her difficulty in learning is simply personal inability. Thus, although Pam is unable, unwilling or just cannot conceive of resisting the diagnosis set by those in authority, unconsciously she does resist suggestions that her difficulty in school environments was because of a personal inability to learn.

This form of resistance in women is discussed by Anyon (1989), who argues that although women are often expected to be passive, pliable social beings, some women present forms of resistance within social settings. Anyon states:

*Most females engage in daily (conscious as well as unconscious)
attempts to resist the psychological degradations and low self-esteem
that would result from total and exclusive application of the approved*

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ideologies of femininity: submissiveness, dependency and passivity
(Anyon in Walker 1989:23)

By referring to poor teaching practices Pam is able to cope with or 'resolve' and re-form her identity within the social messages which have been impressed on her since childhood.

This form of unconscious resistance to the control implemented by those in authority is also seen in Sarah's account of her school experiences which she also relates, to some extent, to certain social impediments rather than a lack of personal ability   She says:

> *When I was younger, which they also talk about in younger age groups from the age – I think from the age of about 5, me and my parents – we lived abroad, we lived in Germany, because my parents were in the forces*
>
> *But basically I wanted to take these reading books from school, I had a really high reading age, I was really good and onto big books. I was no longer into Janet and John, I was onto big books.*
>
> *But because they wouldn't let me take the books home, I was quite a stubborn person and I actually refused to read for two years.*
>
> *I can't remember doing this and my parents they tried to buy the books they tried everything. But I wouldn't do it and that's why I had a backward reading age.*
>
> *And once you came back here, the system set up with 30 kids in the class and if you're clever and ahead of the class you get support from the teachers because they want you to succeed, but the rest just sit there and wallow and the fact that I was bullied through my whole education as well and I was more interested in staying alive than learning anything, so the most learning I have ever done was since I left school*

Once more the onus of an inability to learn is directed to external factors. Her reflection on being continually bullied within the education system and the inference that she was more interested in 'staying alive' implies that she considered her ability to learn impeded by both her focus on the bullying and the external factor of being bullied.   Humphrey and Mullins (2002) and O'Moore (2000) found that children are more likely to become depressed and experience

low self-confidence if they are bullied within their schools. I argue that the tone of her references to wallowing in school and of simply wanting to stay alive supports Humphrey and Mullins (2002) findings and that Sarah did appear to have low feelings at that time.

Nevertheless, Sarah's reference to a good reading level when young and her choice not to read, not because she could not but because she would not, implies that she reflected on how much she achieved in resisting certain types of control from both her parents and her teachers. (Szente 2007) found that children who consider that they have some form of control over their learning are more likely to be confident they will succeed in education. This confidence is also thought to influence their identity. Sarah's belief in her ability to read is upheld by her references to a personal refusal to read. Consequently, she was and in some instances, still is, confident in her capabilities.

This evidence suggests that these individuals through either ignoring official descriptions of their difficulties or marking outside influences as accountable removed from their perceptions the idea of dyslexia as a reason for a lack of ability. You could say that all four participants have shown some form of control or at least presented another rationale for their difficulties within their school experience which has nothing to do with a lack of personal capability. Thus, even though the women may perceive themselves as lacking in confidence, they have also reconstituted this with reasons other than a personal inability to learn. This is seen in more detail in the following section.

The reactions of the participants to social perceptions of dyslexia as difference – disclosure

Whilst these respondents appear to consider their abilities sufficient to continue into Higher Education and the men are able to resist the limited expectations of their abilities held by those in authority, and consequently, appear confident in their abilities with dyslexia on a personal level, these same men are not so sure of the public's perceptions of their abilities with this condition.

An example of how an individual with dyslexia perceives social expectations of his abilities is seen in John's view. He states,

> *I only tell people when I have to because most have preconceived ideas about dyslexia which just mean[s] people [with dyslexia] are lazy or stupid and they think it's just a fancy term for being stupid*

John's expectation of other people's views of those with dyslexia could stem from his experiences within his schooling which, demonstrated in his reflections, still has the ability to make him angry. This is further evidenced in Measor and Sikes's (1992) argument which states that educational environments can have an influence on many individuals' understanding of themselves and of others around them.

This hesitancy to inform other people is also demonstrated by Ben in his announcement,

> *I have to do things twice at least. .So writing a thesis has shown the dyslexia as quite a problem*

> *I think the mistake I made is at the beginning of the thesis, I didn't tell my tutors. It was only when they saw how disjointed my work was that I had to say I have got a bit of a problem here... I don't like to admit I have a problem I think it's a pride thing*

His explanation for not informing his tutors of his difficulties until he got into problems suggests that, because he did not seek out support on a private level

by failing to inform his tutors of his condition, support had been forestalled. Reasons for this hesitancy in disclosing any difficulties he may have experienced may also be due to the reactions of his family members as well as his school's response. Thus, as we have seen, his reluctance to inform others of his condition may also stem from such instances as his father's reaction to his difficulties in obtaining a degree. Yet we cannot ignore the confidence Ben portrays when he admits his reluctance to disclose could be a *pride thing'* and which suggests he does not want to appear incapable or unable to achieve through his own inability. Once more, such reactions could be linked to masculine behaviour. Sheldon (2004:76) states, men are often '*struggling to meet societies (and their own) expectations of what it is to be male and what it is to be...impaired'*. I contend that the contradiction Ben tries to resolve between this reluctance on the one hand and an assertive demeanour on the other is also shown to impede his progress at times.

John and Ben both appear to be hesitant to discuss their dyslexia with 'others' and this could be because they do not want to appear as 'different'. This suggests that both men are unwilling to be scrutinised as 'different' to others. Sheldon (2004) argues that such perceptions of 'difference' can generate 'negative' connotations. Connell (1995) argues that being perceived as 'different' is a threat to masculinity as defined through notions of strength, rationality, and logical reasoning.

This idea that being seen as 'outside of' or 'different' to social expectations is a hindrance is summed up quite well in Paul's account. Although Paul, a 26 year old in his first year of a science degree, expresses 'relief' at being labelled dyslexic, he describes this relief as a double-edged sword when referring to the dyslexic label as an identifying marker. He explains,

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I feel it has affected my identity and I have felt miffed about being dyslexic

I do not like having to struggle in university although I suppose I am relieved that at least now I know why I am like I am

However, I still feel others see me as slow and stupid, even with the label, their view of me has not changed

And I am angry about being dyslexic I don't want to struggle all the time in this work

...so I only tell people when I have to

Most people have preconceived ideas about dyslexia They think it just means people are lazy or stupid and those who do think about it just think of it as a fancy term for being stupid

.I hide it because people just see you as stupid and when you say you are dyslexic they see it as an excuse

The first interesting point is the similarity in John and Paul's remarks on most people's *'preconceived ideas about dyslexia'* as a *'fancy term for being stupid'* Further, Paul's admission to being *'miffed'* that he has the condition and the offhand manner he uses to refer to being relieved demonstrates that being accredited with the label dyslexia for him is simply an explanation for his difficulties and provides others with a detrimental marker of 'difference' However, it is also interesting to see that, unlike John's anger, which is directed at certain authorities, Paul's anger seems to be directed at his condition or rather the label. Like Pam's reactions, Paul does not refuse official accreditation of his difficulties in certain areas but unlike the women's response to that diagnosis his belief that the label attracts social stigma is the source of his angry response This suggests that his reference to dyslexia does not involve a personal construct of his identity with this condition, but appears to relate only to the public label. That John was only diagnosed with dyslexia a few weeks before the interview could have an influence on his thoughts in that he has had little time to process how this might impact on his sense of self. A Goffman (1968) claim that this initial process posits the individual's understanding of

'difference' as a comparison between a personal condition and society's notions of what is 'normal'. In this context 'difference' is presented as a stigmatising label. Once more, we can see that this refers to the stigma of a public label and not to a personal understanding of individual capability in relation to a condition.

This suggests that Paul is unable to formulate a personal construction of his dyslexia as do the other participants because his reference to this condition is projected through his perceptions of what society may equate with this label. This is evident in his remarks that others *still* view him as *'slow and stupid'* and demonstrates that he has had some detrimental experiences with other people judging him and his abilities in the past, and it is evident that he firmly believes this label will not change any of their thoughts on this subject. Thus, his perceptions of his dyslexia are influenced by society's expectations of dyslexia and the people who are described as dyslexic. Riddick (2000:655) states that labelling *'can encapsulate or distil the stigmatisation that already exists'*. As Paul envisages, the social perception of dyslexia is that it is a 'fancy term' for 'stupidity'; his anger is, therefore, directed at being identified within this term not the condition itself.

Robertson (2004) states that anger is often a reaction to his being identified as different from 'the norm'. This is seen in the reactions of Ben, John and Paul who equate their label as one which society has misconstrued as representing a characteristic flaw in their identity and as such they wish to hide it from public view. If we acknowledge how far they suspect such a label will distil the *'stigmatization that already exists'* (Riddick 2000:655) that is, accusations of being 'slow and stupid', it will make clear the extent to which they perceive social interpretations of the label are detrimental to their identity. This is referable to Goffman's (1968) discussion of the 'spoiled identity' in which the

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invisible or hidden stigma, in this case dyslexia, presents the individual with the dilemma of how or even if they should disclose their condition to others. Jenny Morris, in her discussion of gendered imagery, states,

> *the social definition of masculinity is inextricably bound up with a celebration of strength and perfect bodies. At the same time, to be masculine is not to be 'vulnerable'* (Morris 1991:93).

The men's hesitancy in disclosing their condition could be due to their unwillingness to expose any vulnerability. This suggests that these men perceive that people in society regard their dyslexia as an inability (they are thus classified within the medical model of disability)

I contend that this reassessment by the two participants of the understanding of their identity with this condition has enabled them to project a more advantageous, and at times, superior construct of themselves and their abilities And yet, not expecting others to view their abilities in a positive light may sometimes impede their progress. It is interesting to see that these men are not confident in presenting their identity with this condition to the 'outside' world and this could be due to their conviction that society's understanding of 'difference' presumes an inability or lack of ability and that the attachment of the dyslexic label attracts social stigma.

However, not all participants talk about the label as a detrimental attachment. Some of the women spoke about the benefits of having this label, and appear to differ with most of the men's views

Interestingly, some of the women's notions of the label appear to be in complete contrast to many of the men's considerable reluctance to be identified with this label. In this study, over half of the interviewees referred to a relief in gaining the

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label. One example of this sense of relief is seen in Sarah's account. Sarah, a 36 year old student in the first year of a Social Sciences degree, states:

> ...*I was relieved to be diagnosed as dyslexic because, it wasn't at this university it was another one, and the only way I was going to get any study help was by being diagnosed with dyslexia. There was no- if I wasn't diagnosed as dyslexic they basically said, well go down the corridor and speak to the teacher in the room and he might be able to help you.*

What, a sort of English teacher?

> *Yeah, yeah if there was any of it, but it was only after that and I actually complained as I thought it was wrong and unfair that they actually brought it into effect that there was a person there full-time.*

> *Because I thought it was unfair that you had to be dyslexic to get help. And not everybody is good at reading or spelling and I've got quite good reading behind me.*

Like many of the women in this study, Sarah's relief at being diagnosed was in relation to the support that went along with the official diagnosis. Her emphatic comments and the fact that she complained about the support for people who were not diagnosed as dyslexic suggest this was a matter of great concern to her. Her comment that having the label was 'the only way' she was going to get support suggests that she felt she needed help. The legitimacy of a label is also referred to by Riddick (1991) who argues that the formal label, as opposed to the informal label, can be of benefit. She (2000:658) states:

> 'The *majority of adults and children with dyslexia found the label helpful at a private level and many were quite emphatic about the importance of having such a label'.*

This 'need' of support may be due to Sarah's views about her ability; this is expressed in her thoughts about her abilities in her literacy skills. She states:

> *I don't know how to punctuate a sentence and I feel a right Muppet. As long as it sounds right I'm ok but if it doesn't sound right I don't know how to punctuate. If I see my friends, most of whom are foreign students, talk about pronouns, nouns and things like that, I sit there thinking I hope you*

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don't ask me to mention one because I haven't got a clue what you're on about. And you do feel stupid because of that.

This would seem to locate Sarah's lack of confidence as a personal submission, not simply a difficulty in literacy skills. Her reference to being a 'Muppet' and to feeling stupid suggests she is talking about her ability as a person and not just referring to a lack of confidence in certain literacy skills. Because of the lack of evidence concerning whether girls with dyslexia are more likely than boys with dyslexia to suffer from low levels of confidence in their abilities, we cannot link such findings with any certainly to gender characteristics.

However, Killway and Willis (1990) found that girls often admit to lower levels of self-esteem than boys within educational environments. Burden (2005) also found that children with dyslexia are more likely to suffer from lower self-esteem than children without this condition   However, children with dyslexia who are not formally labelled can still struggle with low self-esteem Riddick (1991) states that for some children informal labelling, the accusations of being viewed as 'thick', 'stupid' or 'lazy' is more detrimental to their self-esteem than having the official dyslexic label. This may be another reason for Sarah's comment on her relief at having the official label, as opposed to her informal references to herself as a 'Muppet' or 'stupid'.

Another woman who talked about a lack of confidence in her abilities is Sam. She states·

No I have never felt bright. I don't know how I am at university I feel like I am on a wing and a pray kind of thing

I feel there are different types of people and you have to find your niche I feel I have achieved some good things in my life.

Similar to Sarah, Sam talks about not feeling very bright. Even though she doubts her ability to succeed at university, she counteracts this with the reasoning that she has achieved 'good things' which have enabled her to find her 'niche'. Once more, it appears that she has taken some form of control over her doubts in her ability through looking for achievements in her life and this has enabled her to reflect on her abilities and to find a niche in which she can see the 'good things' she has achieved.

Furthermore, like Sarah, Sam talks about barriers which could have had an effect on her learning abilities. She states:

> My mum has always said I had a very bad primary school. The education system was very bad at the time and it's known that the first year of the GCSE system was renowned to be poor at that time.

I contend that this resistance, their belief in their abilities; and the acknowledgment of outside factors, which they suspect impede their learning, affords Sarah and Sam a certain self-assurance within their lives. A lack of confidence in their abilities is counteracted through certain explanations for their difficulties.

Pam also refers to a coping mechanism which she employs to manage her public self as a person with dyslexia, which is evident in her view that the official accreditation is a means to access a more personal level of backing. However, unlike the men, instead of hiding her condition from other people, Pam advocates the use of other people's knowledge of her condition as fundamental to achieving further support. She explains:

> I don't come out saying I am dyslexic but I don't mind if they know I am dyslexic.

> To be honest I think it helps me quite a lot if somebody knows that I am dyslexic. And obviously I can get extra help and things for it.

And how do you feel it would benefit you?

Well if they could read through my work or something

Last year I got one of my friends, who is on the same course as me, to read through my work and see whether she could spot any of the double meanings or grammatical errors, which of course I found really useful

Because it means that it might have boosted my mark ever so slightly

And she didn't mind doing it at all

So on that sort of thing I think it does benefit me.

Pam considers that other people knowing she is dyslexic will be advantageous to her learning Although she states that she does not personally inform others of her dyslexia, her suggestion that she does not mind other people knowing she has dyslexia supports the idea that these women are able in some respects to resist and at the same time assimilate social references to them as people with dyslexia. You could say that Pam's acquisition of support from her peers, which enables her to gain valuable improvements in her marks, is a further resistance to social accreditation of her as unable to achieve in the academic environment Thus, her relief at the diagnosis could be the reaffirmation that her difference is not related to any personal inability, but is a difference in learning ability Riddick's (1991) study reported that both children and parents found the formal label of dyslexia a sense of relief which could be empowering.

It would seem that both Pam and the other women are not resisting social stereotypical expectations of passivity and obedience, (Elliott 2001) but empowering themselves within existing social boundaries and expectations in order to attain their life goals. Thus, their resistance manifests their understanding of their dyslexia as autonomous beings.

Unlike the men's understanding that their dyslexia should be acknowledged on a private level only, the women have refashioned their personal identity and have come to regard their dyslexia as a tool with which to attain support to aid their abilities, and to maintain their identity with this condition. Bury (1991:461) found that people with chronic illnesses also inject coping mechanisms into their understanding of their illness and are able then to normalise the condition and to incorporate *'it more fully into the[ir]...identity and public self'*.

Therefore, affording the label 'legitimacy' enables some of these women to discover reasons for differences in learning. Legitimacy also presents them with the further evidence that their difficulties are related, to a certain extent, to external differences, which whilst personal in the sense that they are part of the individual's make-up, are also external as they represent differences in learning and not a personal inability to learn. Thus, the legitimacy of the label has further encouraged these women to inform their identity as one of ability. This can be seen in personal narratives with reference to perhaps the most significant public domain in contemporary industrial society – the world of work.

Thus, both women, like John, recognize their ability to be able to learn but considered their environment not conducive to the execution of their capabilities. Once Sarah was diagnosed as dyslexic, she was able to receive support and this gave her a sense of relief. This relief afforded by the label could also provide her with the further proof that her difficulties in learning are not due to any personal inability. Thus, we could surmise that unlike the men's opinion of the label as that which attracts unfavourable differentiation, Sarah's and Sam's identities with the official dyslexic label have been empowered

because the label presented them with an official recognition of their differences

Participants' thoughts on informing prospective employers of their dyslexia

The art of informing/non-informing strategies is evidenced in some of the participants' thoughts about whether they should disclose their dyslexia to people who had some bearing on their career opportunities This became evident when the participants were asked if they would inform their employers of their condition. In comparison to previous acknowledgements from the women, who said they would inform other people, when asked if they would inform prospective employers, they seemed less sure. Thus, there appeared little difference between the men and the women's thoughts about informing employers However, when discussing the reasoning behind their actions there was a difference between the men and the women's reactions.

Even though many women in this study said they were much more likely to *think seriously* about informing their employers they were less likely to state outright that they always let employers know. An example of this is seen from Lyn, a woman in her 40s taking a degree in social work When asked if she informs others that she has dyslexia she replied: *'Yes'*, without hesitancy Yet, later in the conversation when I asked if she told or would tell prospective employers she stated,

> *I don't generally tell people unless it comes up. The next obstacle is job interviews. And I am going to have to weigh up quite carefully, in some ways I feel I need to be up front about it.*
>
> *But in other ways I am still unsure*

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Why? Do you think letting employers know you are dyslexic would affect your employment status?

It shouldn't do – no – not in my line of work (social worker)

Because you can get away with it, I think using computers and things like that there are ways around it and also there's this thing of, I am dyslexic but look at what I have – you know what I mean – not making too big a deal about it and looking at your strengths really.

It is interesting to see that Lyn says she 'generally' informs other people she has dyslexia only if the subject arises. This would imply that she was not so keen to let others know of her condition. However, previously, in the conversation when asked if she told other people she had dyslexia, she answered, yes. Such different responses suggest Lyn's concern depends on who she is informing. This hesitancy when informing some people suggests that she feels they might see dyslexia as an impediment to an ability to 'do the job'.

Morris and Turnbull (2007) in a study of nurses' career progression found that some nurses who were dyslexic suspected their career progression had often been impeded by other people's perceptions of them as having a lack of abilities (Morris and Turnbull 2007). They state:

> *Dyslexia appears to have a negative impact on working practices and career progression...[it] remains a poorly understood and often hidden disability.*
> (Morris and Turnbull 2007:97).

The hidden element of dyslexia is also seen in Lyn's decision on informing employers of her condition. Goffman (1968) argued that those with hidden differences incur problems concerning to whom, and when, how to and even if they should disclose their condition. Problems occur when not informing can lead to others finding out, or when informing can unearth potential stigmatic reactions from others. Fitzgibbon and O'Connor (2002) found that many adults with dyslexia hide their dyslexia from anyone at work for fear of unfair treatment

in the workplace, ridicule or discrimination. This worry might be why Lyn is unsure when or even if she should inform others. However, Ben and John did not have any such hesitancy in letting employers know. Ben states,

I don't think it's something employers need to know

And John agrees:

> *I would never put down that I was dyslexic; employers would think it just means a lack of understanding of the tasks*

The opinions of the students appear to agree with Fitzgibbon et al's (2002) study in that the label is already integrated within social identification as a stigmatic label and, thus, the students fear exposure within this label

However, not all respondents were adamant about not informing potential employers. Reasons behind this exposure however, were not due to the opinion that society views dyslexia in a more 'positive' light Bill was the only man who said he 'probably' would inform his employers of his dyslexia   He states:

> *I like to be as honest as possible, which can be a problem when you're applying for jobs and writing CV's, but I think I would still put it down*

Do you feel this would have an effect on other people's perceptions of your abilities?

> *They would probably see it as a disadvantage because people would see it as a negative thing*

Would you put it down if the form said 'any disabilities'?

> *Yes, I probably would.*

Interestingly, Bill felt that even though such an admission could disadvantage him it was still the correct course of action. However, the reason for this is less about the 'need' for employers to know of his condition than about the need for him to act honestly. This infers that he honestly suspects that others may see dyslexia as a hindrance to achieving worthwhile employment, but in order to be

true to his beliefs he informs prospective employers. Thus, although Bill's reaction to disclosure of his label is different to the others, he still suspects the label to be stigmatized.

However, through non-disclosure of the label and through referring to outside or social constructions which had impeded their progress in learning, some respondents are able to ignore social stigmatisation of the label and present themselves as 'autonomous individuals', which in turn enables them to identify their dyslexia as a benefit, not an impediment. It would appear that these men could make this decision because, in their opinion, unless they informed people, it would remain hidden and compromise their idea of themselves. As Bury (2001:264) states:

> *Under conditions of adversity, individuals often feel a pressing need to re-examine and refashion their personal narratives in an attempt to maintain a sense of identity*

As demonstrated earlier, the men's opinion is that identity with the label 'dyslexia' is stigmatized as a result of public misconceptions of the condition. Consequently, the answer might be to maintain a status considered as 'normal'. In the men's views, disclosure would risk being perceived as unable to succeed in the tasks given. Therefore, the best strategy is to keep their dyslexia hidden.

However, this is not the best strategy according to Lyn. Her refashioning of her personal narrative to maintain a sense of identity is seen in the strategies or coping mechanisms she employs to deal with disclosure. This is seen in her remarks that *'you can get away with it,'* through *'not making a big deal of it'* and *looking at your strengths'.* In this way Lyn like Sam highlights her personal strengths or highlights her 'good points' as a buffer against the perceived 'value'

she thinks others will put on her ability when they know she has dyslexia. Similarly, Petersen (2006) found that his respondents 'emphasised the positives' of having the condition, *'drawing attention to the lessons learnt: the fact that they appreciated life more, or had developed a better sense of humour'* (Petersen 2006 37). Petersen felt this enabled respondents to *'present themselves as active, autonomous individuals'* (ibid), making positive identities out of potentially negative labels.

However, disclosure is not seen as beneficial by all the women in this study. Sue's reaction is completely opposite to Lyn's. However, when we explore this more fully we also find that the reasons behind Sue's choice not to disclose her dyslexia are also different from the men's.   It is interesting to observe that although she previously stated she *'want[s] as much support as possible,'* when asked if she would let employers know of her condition Sue states·

> *No I suppose one reason is I don't want them to know I don't want them to give me something because they have to (long pause). You know, I don't want to feel disadvantaged- I don't want the sympathy vote. I don't feel my ability to do a job is any different to someone who hasn't got dyslexia*

Why?

> *A perception that dyslexia is seen as negative to others*

So would you tell employers once you have the job?

> *No, even if I got the job, I would not say unless there was something extremely difficult that I don't think I could do.*

Unlike Lyn, who believes letting her employers know will enable her to 'prove them wrong' in their suspicions about her abilities, Sue suspects that informing her employers would get her a job, but only *'because they had to'* This view implies that she feels that informing prospective employers of her dyslexia would pressurise them to employ her One reason she might suspect this is due to the legal requirements for employing disabled people in some working

establishments[2]. This implies that Sue suspects she would only obtain a position because of the stipulations concerning disability quotas, rather than her ability to do the job. Her reference to being disadvantaged could refer to the positive discrimination she feels might undermine other people's views of her ability to do the job. Thus, Sue might feel that informing prospective employers would improve her chances in securing employment, but seemingly for the wrong reasons. However, it is also relevant when she talks about others' perceptions of dyslexia as a negative concept. The reference, when added to her comment that she does not want the 'sympathy vote' and her comment that she is able to 'do' the job, implies that getting the job in this context would be the affirmation that her condition requires those without 'it' to look kindly on those with 'it' and, consequently, Sue would become separated from the norm because dyslexia has attracted a negative response. It is interesting to consider that the support she craves from the university environment, she regards as unnecessary and almost inhibiting in an employment situation.

This contradiction could be due to her understanding of the difference in learning skills, especially her academic skills. Thus, she might feel she requires support in an educational environment, but would consider support in a working environment as tantamount to admitting to others a weakness and a personal inability to achieve. We can see here that even though three respondents presented three different responses to the label all believe public perceptions of the label are stigmatized.

It would seem that the concern for each participant is not about whether to inform or not, but about the perceptions of others concerning their abilities. This infers that most of the participants suspect other people have certain negative

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[2] See employment rules on employment quotas of disabled people.

concepts of the dyslexia label and, therefore, of the people who have this condition. However, this study has shown that some individuals with dyslexia are likely to identify this condition, in some respects, with an empowering feature   The issue here is that many of the participants seem to be referring to two forms of dyslexia that formed through the public perception of the label of dyslexia and the private or personal condition. This is further highlighted when we explore how some individuals present their understanding of dyslexia as a disability and themselves as a person within this remit: the tensions between the public and the private

Participants' assessments of dyslexia as a condition and a disability: dyslexia as a 'gift' and a 'burden'

One of the most striking finds of this study is the benefits the respondents accredit to their dyslexia It is interesting to note that all but one of the respondents made reference to their dyslexia in an optimistic manner.   To assess the form this optimism took and the effects dyslexia has had on their lives, I initially discuss the men's thoughts and experiences.

Interestingly, three of the four male respondents referred to their dyslexia as some type of 'gift', suggesting they have formed a specific understanding of their dyslexia.   In John's explanation of 'his dyslexia' we can interpret his reasons for this perceived benefit

John is a 35 year old taking a foundation degree in engineering and explains

> *You can look at it and say, yes dyslexia is a disability, only you can't learn in the same way other people do. But on the other hand, which one is actually disabled?*

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I love the way I think. I love the way I perceive things. I like the concepts I see around me; I enjoy that. Most people don't see that, they don't pay attention to the detail I do. So is it a disability?

No and yes.

It's a disability to the 2D world i.e. the pen and paper world, who have conformed and are able to conform to that specific way of learning...I say most people are disabled by not being able to see as I do.

My father once said 'one day you will realise that your biggest weakness will become your greatest strength'. At the time I did not understand what he was saying but now I think his remark is coming true.

I now consider dyslexia to be much more than a medical condition, it's a gift. I feel dyslexia is a bonus rather than a disability and would not want to be without it.

Intriguingly, John refers to his dyslexia as a 'gift' and a *'bonus rather than a disability'*. This would infer two things. First, it suggests that he considers his 'experience', how he is able to 'see' the world, is not available to people who are not dyslexic. Second, contrasting his dyslexia as a gift and a disability infers a dualistic attitude. He registers his dyslexia as a gift and questions whether, therefore, it can be a disability and for him it obviously is not. However, at the same time he seems to say that disability is disabling, in that it is a measure of what one person can achieve compared to another. But he then changes the onus of 'disabled' onto those without his abilities. Strangely, he mimics the uninformed generalities to which our society is prone which then enable him to remove the stigma attached to this 'disabled' label. In doing this, John identifies his dyslexia as a beneficial part of his identity.

The language John uses is also interesting. His statement of 'loving' the way his dyslexia has allowed him a different perception, and his reference to the conformity to which most people adhere, implies that he regards his ability as superior to those without this condition. These references suggest that John

pities people who are missing out on these extra abilities. This statement is a register of how passionate he feels about his identity with his dyslexia and the benefits it affords him. His testimony to his father's comments further reinforces his view that his dyslexia is the source of these extra abilities. Thus, John's identity is formed largely by how far it elevates him in the hierarchy in which we all live This is a clear indication that John has indeed managed to re-form his identity with dyslexia as a personal benefit and one he would not want to be 'cured' from.

This is also evidenced in Bill's view of his dyslexia. However, Bill's explanation of his dyslexia is more descriptive because of his comprehensive language base Bill, a young man in his early 20s in his last year of a science degree, states

> I am not sure whether to consider it a gift or a disability? ..
>
> It's a kind of specialisation, yes a specialisation that relates to a type of thinking structure. You can think of things in different ways [than non-dyslexics] but you can't always think of things in the same way as others which can be a problem and at times appears to dis-able you'
>
> However, when other people are stuck with problems I can see them at a different angle. Without understanding perhaps at times that I have got to that point. But they are there so that is a good thing
>
> ...also trying to find where to fit in and how to relate to others can be a problem...where in some points in the past I have tried to be as academically good as possible and therefore there is a little bit of superiority complex in there...and I have tried to choose friends who are less intolerant of it.

It is important to acknowledge that Bill took great care when answering these questions. He always reflected on the meaning of the question before giving his answer. His view of his dyslexia as both a constructive feature and a 'disability' suggests that he is contrasting his condition within two extremes, that of a gift, and as opposition to disability.

That he views his dyslexia as a gift is in no doubt. The reference to a 'specialisation' intimates that he views his dyslexia as a form of expertise, as does his reference to a superiority complex when relating his achievements as being beyond other people's abilities. There are times when Bill believes his ability to approach problems in a fresh and innovative way has its rewards. This is evidenced in how he is able to resolve problems because his 'thinking structure' allows him a different approach to that of more conventional thinkers. Such beneficial descriptions suggest that he would not want his dyslexia removed.

However, although these references to extra abilities suggest that he does not equate his dyslexia with a personal inability, he believes society does. This is witnessed in his comment that not thinking as others do can be a problem and 'dis-able you'. This is also seen in Dunne et al's (2002) study of people labelled 'homeless young gay people' who were often associated with the negative aspects of living rough or having limited control of the living environment. Dunne et al (2002) found that respondents often redefined their understanding of the label to register personal meanings of empowerment. Through redefining the label through their narratives both Bill and these young people have incorporated a positive sense of self. It would seem then that Bill like John, has also removed or refashioned the perceived stigma of the label by repressing the intolerance he perceives in others and, in fact, redefines his abilities as 'superior'.

However, although Bill does register his abilities as superior, like John he is unable to present this description to others in society. Whilst he admits his inability to think along conventional lines could present him with problems at times, he is concerned at being seen as 'different'. This is apparent in his choice

of friends: he chooses friends who are 'less intolerant' of his condition, and this seems a curious use of words. Given that he thinks carefully about the language he uses to explain his thoughts, this wording suggests that he would not expect other people to accept him with his dyslexia, only that some people would be more tolerant of him than others with this condition. His reference to his 'superiority' in learning ability is also evidence of a re-forming of his difference.

This narrative, then, exposes Bill's intricate identity Bill's autonomist and confident belief in the benefit he derives from his dyslexic label is, however, solely on a personal level. Like John and Ben, Bill's references to his dyslexia depend on whether he is talking about it within a personal assessment of his condition or whether he is referring to an outsider's appraisal of the label or term. In this instance, Bill is using his understanding of the word disability to refer to being at odds with 'normalised' learning abilities Thus, he, like John, refers to the social barriers which might *dis-able* him in society. Given such social impediments, all three men appear careful not to expose differences which might allow them to be construed as inferior (Connell 1995; Sheldon 2004). Thus, although they could be seen as taking a social model approach to their identity in which they register difficulties in learning as solely social impediments on a personal level (Barnes et al 1999), they are unable to adopt a similar stance when expressing thoughts declaring their views on the beneficial attributes of dyslexia on a more public level

This idea that dyslexia is a beneficial feature of identity is also expressed by Ben. Ben, who was in the final year of an MSc in Social Sciences at the time of the interview, refers to his dyslexia as both a gift and a burden

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I think it's got positive and negative points and I tend to focus more on the positive issues. I like the way it's made me think and I like the way it's made me operate in the world.

I would hate to be one of these people who go through quite blinkered in life. Do the nine to five and don't think about anything else. But it's been hard work to get to that sort of realisation. The way I think is not the way most people think about things (I think). I tend to think quite abstractly and I can think in almost surreal terms about issues

Like John, Ben's remark about not wanting to go through life blinkered and his ability to think in surreal terms suggests that he thinks his dyslexia has given him greater confidence with which to 'operate' in the world than people who are not dyslexic. Thus, on a personal or private level of understanding he views his dyslexia as a benefit. This is further evidenced in his reference to liking the way *'it's made me think'* and how he can *'operate in the world'*. It also suggests that, like John, he would not want to be without his dyslexia.

I think it's OK to say there is an issue but I don't really want to say it to all - It's a pride thing

It is apparent that even though Ben describes his dyslexia as a 'gift', he is not confident about informing other people about this 'gift'. His reference to not informing other people, as a 'pride thing', and that he only let his tutors know when it was evident there was some type of problem[3] suggests that Ben does not want others to know he has this condition.

Thus, although he appears confident enough to acknowledge his dyslexia in the interview, which he knows is in complete confidence, he does not inform other people unless it is absolutely necessary. This would suggest Ben doubts whether others 'see' him as he 'sees' himself. Consequently, Ben's confidence may be a result of an identity sustained through a personal understanding of himself and his condition, which he is not prepared to 'risk' by exposing his identity to the outside world.

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[3] Please see page 214 in this chapter

In this instance, it would seem that the men, in order to meet social and personal expectations, have formulated a personal superiority in ability, whilst also hiding from society's appraisal. To put it another way, whilst both men have presented their dyslexia as a 'gift' by which they are afforded extra abilities, they are reluctant to expose this gift to others, lest their difference is seen as not meeting society's expectations

Furthermore, the women also re-formed how they envisaged dyslexia as a disabling condition when compared to their abilities However, while there are similarities in the re-forming of some of the women's perceptions of their dyslexia as a gift, they vary to a great extent from the men's One example of this is seen in Pam's account. Pam, a 23 year old student in the third year of a law degree, also discussed the benefit of having this condition. However, although she uses the term 'gift' to explain her assessment of the label, her description of 'gift' is in complete contrast to the men's explanations. She states:

> *I think it could be considered a disability where work is concerned If you have actual answers to questions, and certainly if you are writing things down, and you haven't got a computer to check, and things like that, then it can be quite difficult.*

> *On those sorts of grounds, yes I would consider it to be a disability*

> *But on the other hand, I guess it could also be considered a gift because they do say that people have higher IQ levels than other people Therefore, I believe they get the more exciting jobs.*

> *Certainly at least two people I know who are dyslexic, one being my brother, has recently got into the police force partially due to his higher IQ level beating a lot of people, and another being a close friend of the family who has managed to get into the special forces because of his dyslexia.*

Pam's reference to this 'gift' or benefit is viewed within more pragmatic criteria. She was inclined to see the dyslexic label as a talisman which would enable her to access more basic tools, such as Government funding and support. Whilst

Pam signifies that she is pleased with the attachment of this label, her perceptions of the benefits of this condition differ from the men's. Her 'gift' signifies the probability of a higher IQ than most other people, which would facilitate her entitlement to *more exciting jobs*. Therefore, unlike the men who accredit their dyslexia as endowing them with extra abilities, Pam's gift is presented as having the same aptitude as other people, but at a higher level.

Therefore, Pam's account of her dyslexia, its weaknesses and potential benefits is discussed in relation to more fundamental issues and concerns. Pam addresses both the beneficial and detrimental aspects of her dyslexia which influence her working and living environments.

It is also interesting that when Pam refers to how dyslexia might be seen as a disability, (presenting disability as a weakness or problem) she is also referring to the mechanics of the condition. Thus, in her opinion she would be disabled if she was unable to gain relevant support through the allocation of such aids as computers. This suggests that Pam is presenting coping strategies with which to interpret her difference. Bury argues that '*coping involves maintaining a sense of value and meaning in life, in spite of symptoms and their effects*' (1991:461).

In Conclusion

This chapter has explored how the participants in this study have presented their condition depending on whether they are constructing it in light of a public label or a personal aspect of their identity. Due to differences in their representations of each construct each individual approaches their understanding of their identity with this condition through different values. This

was presented in the way the respondents re-formed their understanding of themselves in light of what they envisaged as public stigmatization of the dyslexic label. The chapter highlights how many respondents were able to present differing coping mechanisms including non-disclosure of their condition or personal accounts which highlighted barriers which hindered their learning and which then enabled them to refashion what they refer to as public perceptions of 'inability' which are associated with their dyslexia as a private contrast to public expectations.

The differences with which both men and women were able to associate their experiences were interesting and at times very informative That the majority of the men's accounts re-formed their experiences within constructs of masculinity to present a personal approach through which their reflections of their experience enabled them to express their identity with dyslexia as a positive 'value', both in their ability and their difference, appears to give these men a high level of personal confidence in their own ability However, due to the division of their identity, these men also present a lack of disclosure as a necessity in stemming public perceptions of their ability which have been formed through notions of 'difference' and which at times was found to hinder their goals through a difficulty to ask for public support or aid.

The women, on the other hand, seem to find the dyslexic label a benefit in certain respects Not only did many of them perceive the official label as a tool with which to gain public support, some women also used the label to access more personal support from friends and colleagues.

Therefore, even though having a more passive approach to this label may have impacted on their confidence on one level, it has also enabled them to be more

confident in accessing the relevant people, materials and equipment they needed to attain their goals. This contrast shows that although the men present a more assertive personality than the women, when it comes to acquiring the relevant skills to achieve their understanding of themselves, the women were far more likely to access support. Thus, even though encumbered by social expectations of behaviour, they have re-formed their identity within social expectations of femininity to resist such barriers and to succeed. Whilst they may not have a belief that dyslexia endowed them with 'superior' abilities, their strategies and evaluations of the benefits of the official label have enabled them to gain more support.

However, the study also found that making the public aware of their identity with the 'dyslexic' label was not realised in every respect. The study demonstrated that the reasons behind this could be complex. Although both men and women on occasion would or would not disclose their condition in employment situations, the reasons for this concealment were due to very different motives. Some participants were inclined to inform perspective employers to prove that preconceived visions of the inability associated with dyslexia were wrong, whilst others were likely to hide their condition for fear of acquiring employment through the 'sympathy' vote, a possibility occasioned by the economic pressure of disability employment quotas.

Still others were adamant that exposing their condition or label to anyone, including employers, would not be beneficial to either procuring employment or being seen as 'able' to do the task in hand. Yet, in contrast, as a personal feature, most people in this study discussed dyslexia as a beneficial part of their identity. In some cases the 'difference' perceived as detrimental in a public context was envisaged as an extra 'gift' which enabled them to view the world in

ways that those without this condition were unable to do. It would seem to some

that even with the perceived impediments of this label, having such a condition

is akin to having extra abilities over and above the 'norm'

CHAPTER 6 - DISCUSSION

There have been many myths generated about dyslexic people, but we now know that the truth is that dyslexia is independent of practically every other factor. Dyslexic people are not intellectually deficient, they are not odd and they are by no means inadequate workers. They may have to organise their lives differently from others, but that does not mean they perform less well. Indeed, in many instances it will be found that the problems that they meet are little different from those met by everyone else – but they are exaggerated and made more oblivious (Hales in Miles and Varma 1995:88).

This quote outlines Hale's vision of the realities of dyslexia and the abilities of people with this condition. Yet even when dyslexia is presented in this way, studies have shown that most social representations of dyslexia are still informed by ideas of inability and the people themselves thought of as 'odd' or intellectually deficient (Miles and Varma 1995; Snowling 2000, Pollak 2005; Riddick 1996, 2000).

I agree with Hales (1995) in that dyslexia is independent of 'practically every other factor', yet I argue that due to social expectations and misconceptions of the features associated with the condition, the experiences of those individuals with dyslexia are often detrimental to their well being and the social acknowledgement of the presentation of their condition can affect their confidence and self-worth. However, I contend that due to the lack of evidence or research around how such inferences have been experienced and have informed the perceptions of individuals with dyslexia, and how living with dyslexia has been conceptualised into their identity, this study is not only necessary but also long overdue.

Therefore, this study, using a discourse analysis, explored how people with dyslexia have actively reflected on the tensions between public and private

conceptions of dyslexia when understanding themselves and their identity as people with dyslexia

The study identified three areas of tension which could have some influence on the individual's perceptions of having this condition. First, I considered social perceptions of dyslexia as a 'difference' in ability. Second, I discussed public perceptions of having this label which was further explored within newspaper accounts. Third, I discussed the tensions which surround personal expectations of the condition as a public label and as part of the individual's private perceptions of selfhood, self-worth and uniqueness.

However, because dyslexia as 'difference' is often informed by certain social practices and social identifications as predominantly a 'difficulty in literacy skills', I deemed it prudent to research those who describe themselves as dyslexic yet appeared to overcome these difficulties sufficiently to enable them to pass certain academic criteria in order to continue into higher education. Therefore, this thesis considered some of the issues surrounding living with dyslexia and its impact on the identity of individuals with this condition who are attending Higher Education.

Chapter one explored how tensions surrounding the social expectation of dyslexia exist due to the misrepresentation of dyslexia as solely or predominantly a reading and writing difficulty. This reference, determined through its historic recognition of dyslexia as a medical condition, further misled society's expectations This definition, although presented in a number of prominent and official organisations including the World Health Organisation and the Disability Discrimination Act (1995)' as both a difficulty in literacy skills and a disabling condition, in fact only cast more doubt on the reliability of its

own credentials as a bona fide medical anomaly and disabling condition. Given the fact that the features of this condition are mainly hidden to public perception these tensions manifest social feelings of disbelief surrounding the credibility of people with dyslexia and the rights and support given to conditions classified as disabling.

Chapter two took these tensions one step further and discussed how individual identity as a result of social interaction and representation can reinforce certain meanings about people labelled as dyslexic. The chapter discussed how social expectations are manifest in expressions which appear in both interaction and language to influence experience. The experiences of children with dyslexia were found to be detrimental and influential in some children's belief in their own abilities, self-worth and self-confidence. However, I also identified how interaction between those in authority and children could differ due to the expectations of boys and girls reactions to their school environment and their learning.

The chapter then continued to discuss how adults in Higher Education and employment consider how to identify with their condition in view of social expectation of those with a dyslexia label often wrongly identified as signifying inability. I argue that to counteract these misconceptions some people with dyslexia may formulate a differing understanding of labels in order to support their understanding of themselves as people with dyslexia.

I also discussed how media representations of those deemed to be disabled often produce *'disabling stereotypes'* (Barnes 1992a*)* which further reinforce specific social expectations of those deemed to be within this category, often conceptualizing them as unable to achieve, and as victims of their condition. I

also explored how media, in its attempt to appear newsworthy, presents differences between men and women with a disability through perceptions of a medical model of disability I further argued how media's presentation of people with dyslexia, such as the correlation between dyslexia and anti-social behaviour, could further influence public perception of this condition and the people labelled as dyslexic.

However, I did not presuppose the features of dyslexia to be detrimental to individuals with this condition, but described how some studies found that certain individuals talked about their dyslexia as a benefit This included how some people when acquiring the label felt relief at the diagnosis and their association with it when comparing their differences to others. The study also explored how some individuals went further and felt that having the condition was a bonus to their abilities and how some people claimed that they would not want to be without this condition.

The methodology chapter discussed the theoretical process of research and how it can detrimentally impact on people represented as outside 'normal' parameters of 'ability' and bodily functions. This includes being described as 'disabled'. Discourse analysis has been used to explore, highlight and discuss preconceived ideas of inequality within research to present dyslexia and people described as dyslexic within a more empowering process.

Chapter four presented a discourse analysis of newspaper articles which refer to a number of factors related to social awareness of dyslexia. It explored how individuals who describe themselves as dyslexic conceptualise their experiences and reactions with others in such a way that it appears they have had an impact on their identity as people with dyslexia

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However, these discussions alone are not sufficient to gain a full understanding of the themes considered. To acquire a more in-depth understanding of the thoughts and feelings of the participants and how the inferences of social representations of dyslexia are interconnected and conceptualised requires these issues to be addressed within the theoretical concepts discussed within chapters one and two in order to link together the threads of the study in a more in-depth discussion.

The study relates the participants' understanding of themselves and their ability to certain official definitions and social expectations of dyslexia. This has been discussed in three specific areas: first, how these individuals accredit living with dyslexia through reflections of their school experiences and their understanding of those experiences as related to the present day; second, their understanding of this condition as a public label in which they either hide their condition from others or use the label to gain support; third, how some people with dyslexia not only present their dyslexia as a benefit to their ability but also go to considerable lengths in redefining the label attached to them. In this instance, the label of disability enables them to identify their dyslexia as a personal tool which allows some individuals to view the world in differing ways to those without this condition.

Thus, some individuals have sought to make sense of their 'sense-of-self' in order to understand and to counter its assimilation within social settings determined by social or public perceptions.

Individual reflections and experiences of living with dyslexia

The thesis found that many of these interviewees attached different conclusions to their understanding of their experiences and interactions. Their reflections of

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their experiences of schooling were, to a certain extent, dependent on gender. Although differences in the experiences of men and women were not initially identified as a major factor in this study, the thesis found that the participants' experiences and their reactions to their experiences were contingent, to a certain extent, with their identity as males or females. Thus, to gain a better awareness of how they conceptualised their experiences and subsequent reflections of having and living with dyslexia, their reflections and thoughts of having this condition were on occasion discussed through constructs of gender. In this way the thesis identified how individuals with dyslexia may adapt, negotiate and redefine the dominant discourses of disability and dyslexia in relation to their understanding of themselves as people with dyslexia

This was further identified in the use of language and the representation of individuals through constructs of gender in media articles. Thus, newspapers appear to present individuals as overcoming adversity in order to attain success. This often relied on constructs of gender to project either a hero or tragic figure.

This was also discussed in chapter 6 in how the men in the study frequently displayed differences in both attitude and behaviour in their reflections of their experiences with authority within their schools when compared to the women's reflections. These differences appear to be consistent with constructs of masculinity, in which reactions were more likely to include anger and frustration. However, the men also expressed a confidence in their ability which appeared to stem from a personal sense of capability in learning. This sense of competence was further identified in the way both men chose to ignore

explanations for their difficulties in learning and found different reasons for their impediments in learning certain academic skills.

One example derived from Ben, who referred to his dyslexia as a 'handicap' but demonstrated that his confidence in his ability, even with this 'handicap', was so strong he was able to accommodate his dyslexia even though he never acquired an official label. One reason for this confidence in ability could be due to, in part, an assertiveness perceived more often in males when finding school work difficult, than in females. Thus, through refusing to associate their difficulties solely with a personal inability to learn and recognising how social impediments had impacted on their learning abilities, these men appear to have re-formed an understanding of their ability. The removal of 'blame' has enabled these individuals to identify their aptitude within a more 'competent' and 'able' agenda.

Re-forming a personal understanding of ability in view of an inability to achieve, with reference to schooling

One way in which participants seemed to achieve this re-formation is seen in how they presented outside influence as a reason for their difficulty in learning certain literacy skills.

Interestingly, some participants in this study appear to reformulate an understanding of their ability and relate it to their dyslexia as both enabling and beneficial. This was perceived through their acknowledgement that the difficulties in learning within their education were due to social barriers. I argue that their references to certain difficulties in learning have been constructed through the social model of disability which has enabled them to describe their

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difficulties as stemming from social barriers such as 'poor' schooling and thus removing the onus of 'blame' from a personal inability to social inaptitude

It was interesting to see that some newspaper articles found that some people with dyslexia had similar views, especially considering that these views appeared in personal reflections of experience and their view of their dyslexia rather than references to individuals with dyslexia or the condition These were significant as it appeared that personal references within the articles predominantly highlighted the social impediments which impacted on their leaning, and how individuals with dyslexia were far more likely to express their dyslexia as a form of 'benefit' or appreciated having the condition. As one individual within the media was quoted as stating, having this condition was the 'key' to his success. These descriptions, which appeared in many of the media articles, are in complete opposition to the social images of dyslexia as a 'burden' or abnormality and which impedes the individual. They are relevant and highlight how individuals with dyslexia can and often do re-form a specific understating of their abilities which differs from social preconceptions.

It is also important to acknowledge that whilst both men and women in this study expressed dyslexia as a benefit, their descriptions often appear quite different   Some of the women's understandings of their ability, whilst acknowledging social barriers, also internalised, to a certain extent, the conclusion of those in authority that their difficulties were due to a more personal inability to learn. This was described by Pam who told how her school's explanation for her inability to learn was a personal problem Even though she had family members who were described as dyslexic and suspected she also had the condition, she was unable to form an understanding of her

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abilities or difficulties without the accreditation or acceptance of the official diagnosis. This was further evidenced in the fact that some women claimed that being selective in who they informed could be beneficial in gaining support.

The fact that this lack of diagnosis impacted on Pam's levels of confidence to such an extent that she started to doubt her ability to succeed implies its significance in the formation of her perceptions of herself. I have argued that passive acceptance of regulation is in line with research which states that such reactions were influenced, to a certain extent, by social expectations of female behaviour in educational environments, because assertive and protracted aggression or outbursts of anger would be seen as improper behaviour.

However, I also claim that some women do resist these forms of control when referring to their lack of ability to succeed in literacy skills. Evidence of this appears in Pam's, Sarah's and Sam's narratives of their explanations of the social barriers they associated with their inability to learn. This implies that they did not fully internalise the reasons they were given for their inability to succeed. Thus, the feelings of relief that the women spoke about at having the official dyslexic label could also be seen as a qualification that other reasons are present. They felt able to accept the official recognition with relief. This may be because they were able to consider other factors which had impacted on their learning and an official identification of their condition verified and underpinned their new confidence in their ability. In this context the women were able to perceive their dyslexia as an asset not a flaw.

Interestingly, it would seem that although both men and women may differ in their forming of a personal understanding of themselves with dyslexia, the outcome, that they view their dyslexia as a 'positive' characteristic, appears

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similar   However, the women were less inclined to be aggressive or as assertive as the men; their reflections also included external barriers which had an influence on their ability to learn and which also informed their identity Consequently, this realisation has enabled them, in part, to acquire the strength and credibility to at least attempt to succeed within Higher Education

However, the confidence which these men and women appear to present concerning their ability is not synonymous with some of their decisions on whether to disclose the condition to others.   This confidence seemed to disappear when some of the participants spoke about the reasons for when, or even if, they should disclose their condition to others

The understanding of dyslexia as a public label: disclose or not to disclose that is the question

It was also interesting to see that the confidence the men portrayed in personal ability did not extend to a more public exposure. Thus, some students were less likely to disclose their condition to others The fact that some respondents were hesitant to disclose their condition to public review corresponded to evidence discussed within chapter one and two which found that people with dyslexia often appear hesitant to disclose their condition for fear of reprisals or discrimination Furthermore, some students felt that personal disclosure could also be presented as justification for others to bully or treat them detrimentally could also have some influence on hesitating to expose their condition to others

However, whether to divulge their condition to others was not simply a question of yes or no. The decision not to disclose does, however invite deliberation on whether to disclose at a later or more fitting opportunity revealing the complications present within a hidden condition. Thus, the hidden aspect of the condition was also seen to influence doubt surrounding the condition as a genuine medical and disabling entity as discussed in chapter 2. This was further identified in the study of newspaper articles in chapter 5, which registered to doubt present in social perceptions at the present time. It is no wonder then that people with this condition are less than willing to disclose their condition to public scrutiny, given this doubt and the lack of accreditation afforded dyslexia as a disabling condition.

Signifiers of dyslexia often present dyslexia within a medical model of disability in which dyslexia is viewed as an inability or lack of ability to succeed in certain areas such as reading and writing (as stated in the World Health Organisation). Such signifiers appear to imply an inability to learn extended to employment prospects and career opportunities. This often presented people with dyslexia as lacking the ability to succeed within specific working environments. Once again this was evidenced with dramatic effect in the reports around the concerns of the abilities or inabilities of nurses with dyslexia, and the exasperation of one reporter in the media chapter, at a woman with dyslexia who aspired to become a doctor. These references give credence to the participants' views that 'others' would perceive their ability as lacking and therefore their need for hesitancy to disclose their dyslexia to individuals as powerful as employers appears justified.

This whilst not conclusive, reinforces the concept that the social recognition of dyslexia may enforce social expectations of the condition already persuaded of the inability of people who are dyslexic to acquire certain standards of learning It was further argued that language and terminology used to refer to the needs and abilities of people with dyslexia exposed perceptions based on the medical model agenda (Oliver 1991) in some discussions. That a form of stigma had been attached to the label of dyslexia was witnessed in the media references to 'suffering from' the condition and the inferences of social 'pity' for the person's inability to attain 'normal' levels of achievement Justification for deferring to a 'cure' for this condition was implied within correlations between anti-social behaviour and dyslexia

Social perceptions are further reinforced through official policies and legal acts. The WHOs definition of dyslexia has impacted on social expectations of the ability or rather 'inability' of people deemed to be dyslexic and has often portrayed people with dyslexia as 'inadequate', lacking in ability to learn and often equating their intellect in comparison to their ability in literacy skills, in which they are then found to be wanting Again, such perceptions were described within the newspaper articles. References described dyslexic brain function as different from 'normal' brain function and a reason why people with this condition have a difficulty with reading and writing. Using the testimony of 'experts', the articles were able to compare the 'dyslexic brain' with a 'normal brain' and found it wanting

Furthermore, sensational language within the articles has incorporated a sense of fear around the impact which dyslexia might have on people. This was described through the correlation between dyslexia and anti-social behaviour.

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Articles also voiced apprehensions about the ability of people with dyslexia to train to be doctors. Fears were expressed that an individual with dyslexia could not fulfil the rigorous learning requirements in place. The overall presentation of the article inferred that if people who are dyslexic find some aspects of the learning criteria difficult, it is not because of the teaching methods but due solely to the inability of the individual to do the work because of their dyslexia.

It was argued that these correlations inferred a more sinister link or causal effect. The chapter argued that insinuations of anti-social behaviour or an inability to make sound judgements could have a detrimental impact on the social awareness of people with dyslexia by not simply presenting dyslexia as an inaptitude but also implying reasons to fear people with this condition.

I argue that these static descriptions of dyslexia have a dual effect on social perceptions of people with dyslexia. Firstly, the lack of recognition of other factors which might impact on a person's learning abilities makes it difficult for 'others' to associate dyslexia within images of 'ability' or as a benefit. Secondly, because of the dominant, misguided descriptions of the features of dyslexia, people with this condition who are seen as having 'good' reading and writing abilities might be considered by 'others' to be either 'cured' or not have had the condition in the first place. This could cause 'others' to doubt the credibility of the label or reference to be attached to an individual.

Many of the participants also spoke about accusations that people with dyslexia were 'lazy' 'slow' or 'stupid'. That the participants may not have seen the media reports mentioned in chapter 4 is not important, because their reflections show they are conscious that social expectations of their ability as people with dyslexia are often viewed within such detrimental terms. This could also imply

that one of the reasons why many of the participants were adamant that they would not inform others of their label is because, in their opinion, the signifiers attached to dyslexia impart preconceived ideas of the condition. Thus, media and social constructions of disability were often projected within specific values of disability as ineptness and inability, witnessed in the continual expression of dyslexia in joke form or as a substitute for a general term to refer to disability Furthermore, newspaper articles, in referring to remedies or treatment objectified through the use of specific emotive language which refers to people with dyslexia as 'suffering' from their dyslexia or struggling to 'overcome' this impediment in relation to 'cures', reinforced social constructions of dyslexia and that posit dyslexia within the medical model of disability as requiring a cure from this 'disorder'.

This view reinforces their perception of this label as a form of stigma on a public level of identity. To this end, it is easy to see why many people with dyslexia speak of hiding their condition for fear of ridicule and the notion that disclosing their condition to some people could disadvantage them in such areas as employment opportunities and career choices. Thus, the need for or reason why some people might not want to disclose this condition could be due to the tensions surrounding the meanings and social conceptions in which dyslexia has been formulated It is, therefore, all the more surprising that some of the participants not only saw the label as a benefit but also saw selective disclosure of their condition as a further benefit

Some women not only described the official dyslexic label as a relief, but also claimed the label as a tool to be used to further their aims. This view of the label as a legalised tool was identified in Pam's account, in which she appears to re-

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form the social representation of the label as a social 'stigma' to a more 'positive' signifier in which she is able to describe the term as beneficial in acquiring support. Allowing a selective number of people to know of her condition gave Pam the means with which to further her support on a personal level. Thus, through re-forming the discourses surrounding the label and manipulating its meaning on a personal level she could further her aims. Unlike the men who resisted authority and fought against social interpretations, Pam was able to both conform and resist social control enabling her to view the label, not just the condition, as a benefit. Contextualizing gender has allowed a delineation of the effects of stigma on the label of dyslexia and on the re-formation of identity.

This was in contrast to the men's view whose hesitancy to disclose their condition to others, no matter the perceived benefits, seems at times to disadvantage them. This was highlighted in Ben's account in which he only acknowledged that he had a problem after a struggle. Although we could surmise that this hesitancy to disclose might be due to a lack of an official recognition, evidence was also presented by Bill who spoke of how informing 'others' such as employers of his dyslexia would only ever be necessary to maintain honesty, which belies a belief that informing others is beneficial. In fact the opposite is more creditable, that his concern on informing could be indicative of a fear that disclosure could harm his chances of employment. That some of these men were so hesitant in disclosing their dyslexia to the extent that it may have impeded their academic achievements is tantamount to a reluctance to be seen with the public stigma which they perceive the dyslexic label to be. Thus, it would seem that they have stigmatised themselves through the public perception of the label.

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Concerns around the unequal ratio of men to women in the interviews were also discussed in the methods chapter. The inequality of men to women occurred because of the difficulty in attaining more men willing to be interviewed. This raises the question that given the numerous organisations (BDA 2006) who acknowledge that there is an equal divide of males and females who are dyslexic, why then was it so difficult to find an equal number of men and women willing to be interviewed; why were many of the male students so reluctant to be interviewed? Whilst this needs to be explored in more depth, it could be surmised that a hesitancy to disclose their condition might also account for the hesitancy in coming forward to be interviewed on this subject. Whilst this cannot be reified it does pose the question that future research is needed to explore this issue.

The hesitancy to disclose appears to confirm the tensions discussed in chapter two because social expectations of dyslexia persist in locating it as a reading disorder. Additionally, the link between dyslexia and disability may have also played a part in their decisions. It was interesting to see that such social descriptions were also present within the newspaper articles discussed at the beginning of the chapter. This implies that social expectations of dyslexia which discern it as an inability to learn are still prolific.

How some people present their dyslexia as a benefit to their ability: the private perceptions of dyslexia

It is all the more surprising then, that in spite of the men's hesitancy to disclose their condition to others, and maybe because of their ability to re-form an understanding of their condition which ignores social definitions and

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expectations, some of them continue to speak of their dyslexia as a gift enabling them to visualise the world in differing ways to those without this condition. One way in which they have achieved this is through their understanding of disability which they also view in differing criteria to the definitions and descriptions in which those with a disability are often presented[1]. This is seen in Bill's description of disability in which he not only refines his understanding of disabling conditions but also forms a view of how disabling conditions appear to enhance his ability to see the world in differing ways.

This re-forming by some individuals of their understanding of themselves as disabled people demonstrated how some students had converted their description of disability in order to redefine themselves within this term. This is seen in Bill's descriptions of 'disability' in which he presents the differences associated with disabled people as an enablement by which to experience the world differently, not as a negative prospect, but as an alternative yet beneficial experience enhanced by 'difference'. This implies that Bill has transformed discourses of disabling conditions in light of his understanding of his own condition. Thus, it is noteworthy that some participants have re-formed certain understandings of disability in order to include themselves within these categories.

This is further reified in John's remark that the question should be, 'who is 'disabled'? Those who have a two dimensional view of the world, which he considers is how those without dyslexia will see the world, or those like himself who have extra abilities which have enabled him to have differing views of the world. The implication is that it is those without this condition who are the ones

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[1] Please see DDA 1995 and WHO definitions of disability as inability to achieve everyday activities.

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who should be 'pitied' as they do not have such abilities In this respect, far from acquiring a 'cure' for dyslexia, the need appears to be to expose the benefits of having dyslexia. Thus, for some of these participants dyslexia is more than just a condition, it has given them new ways in which to experience the world which far from being detrimental to their identity enhance it.

Therefore, these individuals, through reforming their understanding of the term 'disability', and recognising social barriers as impediments to their learning have, seemingly, formed an awareness of their ability which has impacted on their sense of self This may well account for their belief that their ability is sufficient to cope with the challenges of Higher Education

The ability to view dyslexia as a benefit was seen in both the men and women in this study. That only one man considered his dyslexia as without benefit shows how most of these individuals were able to gain some vision of their condition as a 'positive' part of their identity It is also interesting to see that the only man who did not envisage his dyslexia as of any benefit had only recently been informed or defined as dyslexic. It is even more interesting to see that his anger was not addressed toward social barriers but was focused on the accreditation of this label. Reasons for this view appear to be his agreement with the social perception of dyslexia as an inability Reasons for a lack of a private re-forming of his dyslexia could be the short length of time (he only knew he had dyslexia a few months before the interview) he had to acclimatise his personal reference to his ability and his understanding of himself with this condition

Thus, the thesis explored how, in spite of, or maybe because of, these social representations many of the participants in this study presented an altogether

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different view of the reasons behind their difficulties in learning at the same rate as other people and of the features they associated with their understanding of their dyslexia. I explore here how these differences in understanding dyslexia can be seen to be made reputable when discussed within discourses of identity and discourses of dyslexia.

Many of the participants in the research spoke of the benefits of having dyslexia. This was interesting as the premise of and definitions associated with dyslexia have often been described within constructs of 'inability'. Even though dyslexia has been initially identified as a type of 'word blindness' and then defined and classified as a disabling condition and an educational difficulty in reading and writing, most of the individuals informed an understanding of their dyslexia through a complex and frequently subtle inference of personal meaning. This private expression often differed from social descriptions when referring to their own identity with this condition.

Evidence of this private re-forming of identity with this condition was found through some participants disregard for social definitions and social expectations which were regularly shaped by official definitions of dyslexia and social constructions of the condition described as disabling. The thesis explored how such references of dyslexia within newspaper articles often represented specific features described as dyslexic, often reinforcing specific stereotypes of 'dyslexic' ability.

However, the study also discussed how some individuals accommodate and reform such descriptions of their identity due to their understanding of their dyslexia which is never static in construct or context but is seen and experienced through fluid and transient modes of thought which enable them to

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adapt, re-form and reclaim views of themselves with this condition. Some participants formed their identity with their dyslexia in particular ways In some instances the official parameters within which dyslexia is described and defined have been re-formed by some participants in such a manner that this has enabled them to recognise their experiences with dyslexia in a more positive manner.

The private identity of individuals with a condition described as an official medical and disabling impairment is often discussed within more 'traditional' discourses of disability or medicalisation This study has shown that individuals with dyslexia draw on different discourses to explain their experiences and understanding of themselves. They, at times, have ignored or refused more 'traditional' discourses of dyslexia, whose onus is on individual impediment as the cause of an 'inability to achieve,' and have reformulated the mode of discourse and have accredited the 'blame' of an inability in learning to societal values described within social expectations of dyslexia.

That some of the men also expressed how their condition has enabled them to view the world in different ways from those without this condition was of special interest The opinion that having dyslexia enables some people with dyslexia to have superior qualities, thus extending pity to those without dyslexia, was shared by most men. In their presentation of dyslexia as a gift they reinforced their beliefs that the source of an inability to learn is the social barriers and attitudes in place at any given time But also, they further informed an understanding of their ability as more than just a benefit.

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The discussions of Ben and Paul are a reflection of the esteem in which they hold their abilities as people with dyslexia. Indeed, those people who do not have dyslexia are thought by them to suffer from a narrow and restricted view of the world.

The reactions of the men often appear quite extreme. The way in which they associated their condition with being given a gift or with acquiring superior abilities was far removed from the 'traditional' social concept of a condition deemed to be disabling. To the men this appeared to be encapsulated within differing descriptions of both the meaning of disability and the representation of the features of dyslexia.

Thus, individuals have reformulated their understanding of themselves and their abilities which, at times, is at odds with the social expectations of dyslexia. In reformulating their understanding of themselves and their abilities and through making sense of the differences between their explanations of ability and social references, many of the participants have succeeded in viewing their dyslexia as a 'gift', equating their dyslexia as an attribute as opposed to an impediment. However, this presentation of their dyslexia is further impacted by their view of society's expectations of dyslexia. Thus, dyslexia, although referred to as a benefit, is often hidden from public gaze for fear of more negative associations.

The ways in which many of the participants in this study have defined and presented their understanding of their dyslexia have been suggested to differ from the descriptions presented by society. Reflecting on their experiences with dyslexia, these individuals have adopted forms of understanding which have enabled them to resist or reform 'oppressive' social values and understanding of the ability of people with dyslexia.

The concept of identity is complex but within this study there evolved enough evidence to suggest some of the participants have amalgamated their perceptions of their condition with the current social perceptions and expectations dyslexia attracts. As a result of this they have been able to re-form their identity as a flexible concept with which to accommodate both a personal and public frame of reference.

However, the study showed that some participants seemed to ignore the view that dyslexia had impeded their learning and associated the difficulties they encounter with social barriers. The recognition that their difficulties stemmed from 'poor' teaching environments or a lack of understanding of the 'needs' of people with dyslexia enabled some of the participants to reform their opinion of their abilities Chapter one explored the articles which discussed the social barriers which could impede individuals in accessing the relevant learning requirements or opportunities. This was discussed within the social model approach (through the social model of disability).

It was interesting to note how some articles referred to employment and education through the social attitudes which have impeded people's learning or employment opportunities. These references to social barriers were examined through the language used in the presentation of attitudes The articles showed how social obstructions can result in inadequate learning environments for children with dyslexia and in the formation of discriminatory views by employers on the employability of people with dyslexia. These social impediments were discussed as an explanation for the high unemployment rates of people with dyslexia.

In conclusion

Thus, I contend that the students have made sense of their identity with dyslexia through three areas. To enable a personal understanding of their difficulties and at times an inability to achieve certain 'normal' learning requirements these individuals have sought to highlight outside or social barriers which have influenced and at times prevented their learning ability. Thus, they ignored or re-formed social accreditations of having dyslexia, at least on a private level, and sought to inscribe their abilities with extra qualities.

However, in order to re-form an understanding of dyslexia as a personal benefit some participants have felt that social awareness of this label is detrimental as a reference, thus, the label is a stigma. Consequently, with this view in mind, some of the men in this study through their inability to view public exposure as a benefit in any way have, at times, prevented themselves achieving certain goals or have hindered their learning. In this way, it would appear that these men were not only stigmatised through public perceptions of their ability with this label but that they also hindered their achievements through self-stigmatisation.

Nevertheless, they re-formed their understanding of disability when it is associated with themselves as people with dyslexia in order to perceive disability in a more 'positive' manner. In order to make sense of certain abilities which they may view as different to those without dyslexia, they have redefined their dyslexia to be understood as a personal benefit or gift enabling some of these people with dyslexia to consider their goals as not only achievable but at times, to suspect their abilities are superior to those without this condition.

It would appear, then, that the concepts highlighted by the participants in this study go further than those envisaged by Hales (1995). Far from viewing a

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person with dyslexia as an inadequate worker, who may organise their lives to accommodate social barriers to their abilities, some individuals with dyslexia may on occasion present the abilities of people with dyslexia as having differing styles which may enhance society's requirements The pity is that due to continued misrepresentations and society's inability to see this difference as beneficial, many people with dyslexia choose to hide their true feelings, preferring to be identified as 'normal'. In light of the continual references otherwise in both official definitions and media representations and other studies, such actions are understandable. However, that should not prevent studies from identifying these misconceptions in anticipation that with continual research, social understanding will change and those identified as dyslexic will be seen for what they are: individuals often disinclined not to disclose their identity as people with dyslexia, because of society's inability to accommodate and recognise that dyslexia does not present inability or lack of intellect but in some cases may mean differing abilities or ways of perceiving the world which are beneficial to both individuals with dyslexia and society alike

CHAPTER 7 - CONCLUSION

This thesis explored how students in Higher Education identify with their dyslexia in view of the tensions which surround public and private perceptions of dyslexia. The research has examined the ways in which individuals with dyslexia reflect experiences of living with dyslexia to identify how they have made sense of having both the condition and the label attached to them. The thesis also explored how public references in the form of media portrayals of dyslexia can impose specific ways of identifying this condition and individuals labelled as such, which are often representative of dominant discourses of disability. It becomes clear that an individual's perspective of the world influences the ways in which they identify with their abilities in their day-to-day lives which subsequently influence their understanding of their dyslexia. However, we can see that individuals with dyslexia, even in the presence of dominate discourses which present dyslexia in some respects as an inability or lack of ability, often draw on differing discourses in order to make sense of their own location in society and to deal with difficulties which arise. It is important, then, to understand the inferences of differing discourses to discover the ways in which these discourses have been consciously or unconsciously integrated into or rejected from everyday life.

The study has demonstrated how particular discourses have been used by individuals with dyslexia to understand and cope with a social identification of themselves with dyslexia formulated through the development of specific perspectives, attitudes and behaviours. It is important to note that dyslexia and dyslexic discourses are not fixed entities which present concrete or definitive

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characteristics and for this reason the ways in which individuals have presented their understanding of themselves are also liable to change and fluidity

A number of patterns and themes have transpired from the research which associates official definitions, educational difficulties, medical descriptions, cultural and public inferences and personal locations with the dyslexic condition. Whilst this research has enabled an exploration of the subtle and not so subtle ways with which society instigates regulation and control over this condition, it has also revealed that the individual's formulation of his/her identity is achieved through a more complex method than simply internalising passive responses to society's assumptions

It is clear to see that people with dyslexia associate differently with social discourses of dyslexia than does society This thesis explored the two main areas in which this difference appears: the private or personal perception of dyslexia as a benefit and the public perception of dyslexia within selective discourses This distinction has enabled us to have a better understanding of how people with dyslexia variously experience and discern themselves with this condition. The research demonstrated that individuals managed, adapted and re-formed social representations of dyslexia enabling them a unique understanding of their identity with dyslexia.

The study demonstrated how this unique understanding has enabled them to consider their condition a gift.   However, it also highlighted how their understanding of their experiences and their dyslexia could differ depending on the gender of the participant This revealed that the language, text and context in which they had acknowledged their experiences were often informed through discourses of gender Exploring their experience through this construct enabled

the thesis to discover how men and women differed in how they dealt with their experiences and, thus, how this informed their recognition of their dyslexia. The men highlighted how their understanding of their dyslexia not only enabled them to envisage their possession of extra abilities, but also how it enabled them to see and experience the world in differing ways.

This study then established that some people used their dyslexia to help them gain relevant support in an academic establishment. Whilst some considered their dyslexia a condition which enabled them to acquire differing ways of perceiving the world which enhanced their abilities in some areas in the academic environment, others viewed the label as a benefit enabling them to acquire support in order to achieve their goals.

Through highlighting and exposing the benefits of this condition and encouraging the re-evaluation of the label as a benefit, many of the women appear to have achieved what might be seen as a more responsive environment in which to present their dyslexia and to seek the support they require. Whilst the study acknowledges the benefits of having this condition, it must also acknowledge that many of these individuals have a more 'negative' view of society's expectations of them. The hesitancy in disclosing the condition by the men could be viewed as a form of benefit due to the detrimental quality often attributed by society to the condition but could also result in them failing to obtain relevant support in academic institutions. The rub is that their competencies are often hidden or discredited because of the dominant discourses surrounding social expectations of dyslexia. Through understanding social and personal perceptions of dyslexia, the thesis identified the private and public levels on which people with dyslexia operate. Revealing the private

identity of individuals with dyslexia to the public gaze exposes the social barriers which impede people with dyslexia and enables society to consider the benefits associated with having this condition. Research which furthers such issues, therefore, is not only relevant for people with dyslexia but vital in exposing dyslexia for what it is: a benefit not a burden.

Furthermore, the exploration of students attending universities has enabled a more deductive aspect of the abilities of people with dyslexia to form, in that they have had some success in acquiring certain levels of learning enabling them to understand their capacity to learn within a certain 'accreditation of ability'

Recommendations

This thesis must acknowledge the limitations of this research. It recognises that because it did not incorporate a representative sample of people with dyslexia, either in higher education or in Britain as a whole, it would be improper to make any generalised assertions about the findings and analysis of the study, this includes the sampling size of the men and women. I also acknowledge that simply focusing on students attending higher education cannot be taken as a general view of all people with dyslexia More research is also needed to understand how people who did not attend higher education feel about their condition and if they also envisage any benefit in having this condition and whether they also have differing understandings of their experiences depending on other social and cultural factors. However, I contend that having such a sample size has enabled the analysis to enter into a more in-depth undertaking and has enabled the focus on the references and narratives of the individuals to

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be discussed in greater detail, which would have been difficult to undertake within the confines of this study with a larger amount of people.

We have seen that social expectations of dyslexia are not conducive to ideas of dyslexia as a benefit. For this reason, it is suggested that more advice and explanation of the benefits associated with dyslexia should be made apparent in the wider public arena. It is also significant that the exposure to social barriers which has impacted on many people's ability to learn should be highlighted, enabling other people with dyslexia to discover the subtle oppression and discrimination which can be employed within social descriptions and systematically presented within public arenas such as media outlets.

By presenting and exposing the benefits of this condition and enabling differences in learning within higher educational institutions to be further discussed, another dimension of inclusion, referred to in legal requirements, for people with dyslexia is accessed. Involvement of people with dyslexia in educational establishments and continually highlighting discrepancies within official definitions of dyslexia as a genuine condition and a disability could also further the understanding of the tensions surrounding dyslexia. Exploring the experiences of people with dyslexia through differences of class, race, age and gender could promote the understanding of social, cultural and political inferences which impact on interactions and reactions of people with dyslexia and reinforce the need to distinguish living with dyslexia from other factors.

This thesis, therefore, adds emphasis to the important contribution that has already been made into the experiences of people with dyslexia. It has referred to studies which have acknowledged the correlation of dyslexia with feelings of low self-worth and lack of confidence which can lead to bouts of depression and

enabled us to understand some of the issues which impact on people with this condition

However, this study has demonstrated that even if social expectations perceive people with dyslexia as inadequate and that their experiences with dyslexia can be demoralising and oppressive at times, some individuals do not perceive their dyslexia as a burden. To enable them to achieve this view they have re-formed their understanding of dyslexia as a public label and as a condition It highlights how some individuals with dyslexia can and often do re-form their understanding of themselves in complex ways, expressing and often identifying themselves in duel terms depending on the circumstance or the social setting. This has not only enabled them to perceive themselves as 'different' from people without this condition but has re-formed their understanding of 'difference' to such an extent that they equate their dyslexia as a bonus or gift, and one they would not want to be without.

CALLING ALL DYSLEXICS

WOULD YOU LIKE TO PARTICICAPATE IN AN INTERVIEW

IN COMPLETE CONFIDENCE

TO TALK ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES AND THOUGHTS
ON **DYLSEXIA**

FOR INTERVIEWEES SELECTED THERE IS A CHANCE TO WIN A £20 VOUCHER

If interested please email <u>deborah.shenton@plymouth.ac.uk</u>

APPENDIX 2

Examples from the matrix of the interviews

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
13	do not tell people - only if they must - dys	friends know but she did not specifically tell them			depends on who they are / gets to know them first		told supervisor which was helpful		don't tell people I don't like	tells to avoid embarrassment	used to get embrassed but getting use to letting others know	they may too much
14	only tell family-close friends											
15	do not remind others				one person dismissed it made her feel bad reminding				only tell close people			
16	others do not remember				hidden makes it easier to forget				if not visual others forget			unless the visual clue
17	find straggies to hide/mask the difference	uses many stradgies'/finding stradges to allow her to look/behave 'normally/hide										
18												
19	neg points											
20	have lack of confidence/does not feel bright/struggle	lack confidence to write in front of others				labels herself			feel incompedent lack of confidance in my ability	did not understand why he could not do has others could	poor directional skills have left her with fear of getting lost restricts life	low self e

Name Box: A43   fx dys is dis

Sheet1 Sheet1 (3) Sheet1 (2) Sheet4 Sheet2 Sheet3

Ready

Home | Insert | Page Layout | Formulas | Data | Review | View

Themes | Colors | Fonts | Effects | Margins | Orientation | Size | Print Area | Breaks | Background | Print Titles | Width: Automatic | Height: Automatic | Scale: 100% | Gridlines | Headings | View Print | Bring to Front | Send to Back | Selection Pane | Align | Group | Rotate

A43 | dys is dis

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
32	pos points											
33	visualise/organise/gifted/ think outside the box /creative	good organisational skills						surprised she can think quicker then others sometimes	one day your biggest weakness is your greatess strength			just difference of thinking
34	emphasise with others				deeper understanding							
					deeper understanding of people of people							
35	its recognised more by others	so you get more assistance so can adept to your needs but that's also your neg										
36	does not know what dys is								seen as incompedance			
37												
38	diagnosed dys highlights weaknesses											
39	called stupid/lazy/slow/thick/idiot				lazy by school					at school put in corner of room by teachers		

Sheet1 / Sheet1 (3) / Sheet1 (2) / Sheet4 / Sheet2 / Sheet3

Select destination and press ENTER or choose Paste

CONTACT ORGANISATIONS

Dyslexic Research Trust: http://www.dyslexic.org.uk
The Dyslexic Research Trust was set up by Professor John Stein and Dr Sue Fowler at Oxford University to fund cutting edge interdisciplinary research into dyslexia and other related conditions and to support free clinics to assess and assist people with these conditions.
We exist to support research into dyslexia and related conditions, to make our findings available to the widest possible audience and to help people conquer their dyslexic problems.

British Dyslexic Association: http://bda-dyslexia.org.uk

The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) campaigns for a dyslexia friendly society where barriers to dyslexic people do not exist. The BDA works to ensure that ALL people with dyslexia fulfill their potential. To achieve this we need to create change, set standards and support and enable people. It is the voice of dyslexic people; it listens to their views, represents their agendas and presses for long lasting sustainable change.

Dyslexics.org.uk: http://www.dyslexics.org.uk/
This is an independent, fad-free and no-nonsense website!

The site includes plenty of well proven, practical advice and information for any parent (or grandparent) whose children need help with the basics of the three R's. Primary teachers, SENCos, Basic Skills tutors, in fact anyone involved with teaching or remediating reading will find the content useful too.

Dyslexic Adult Link: http://www.dyslexia-adults.com
Dyslexia help and advice, information, contacts, research and articles about dyslexia; dyslexia in the workplace and at college; books and software; and assessment for adults who may be dyslexic or have difficulties with spelling

Citizens' Advice: http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/
The Citizens Advice service helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent and confidential advice, and by influencing policymakers.

Civil Liberties: http://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk

Liberty is a human rights and civil liberties organisation which campaigns for equal rights The address is liberty, 21 Tabard Street, London, SE1 4LA

Disability Rights
The Disability rights commission is an independent body established to stop discrimination and promote equality of opportunity for disabled people. They have a helpline number for people who want to find out more about the law and disabled people Tel: 08457 622 6333. Or you can write to The DRCA helpline, FREEPOST MICO2164, Stratford upon Avon, CV37 9BR

Government Services: http://www direct gov.uk
Directgov is a government website that provides information about a range of topics and government services

Health: http.//www.nhs24 com
NHS Direct provides advice and guidance on health problems and treatments in England and Wales it can be contacted on 0845 4647

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