PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE PIC:

Counterplan text: do the affirmative, but utilize people-first language to avoid replicating ableism. **ROBERTS[[1]](#footnote-1):** Until recently, **human “disability” has been** conceptually **understood as** an **abnormal, unnatural, and problematic** condition of either the mental or physical self. Located within the individual, disability detracts, disadvantages, incapacitates and prevents one from living a full, normal life. Being that disability has been understood as a diseased condition of the individual, it has often been rendered something to be regulated, and potentially “fixed” or “cured” by the higher knowledge and reason of modern medicine. With the emergence of “anti-psychiatry” and critical disability studies many of the fundamental assumptions of the historical development of “disability” came into question. **Notions of “normalcy,”** the location of disability within the individual, the priestly status of modern medicine as unquestionable, along with the claims of scientific rationality, objectivity and expert knowledge in which the medical model founds its regulatory jurisdiction, **became the target of deconstruction**. The goal of such inquiries was to improve the lives and status of people with disabilities by **renouncing the social construction of disability as** inherent within the **“inferior” or “flawed”** individual. These criticisms are also aimed at shielding individuals with disabilities from oppression and bio-political control by advancing alternative forms of knowledge and sets of understandings distinct and apart from the hegemonic medical model. Advocates and critical scholars advancing these perspectives help to create a better world for people with 2 disabilities by promoting equality, justice and individual autonomy, while also working to eliminate social stigmatization. Recently, many state actors have also embraced this spirit of justice; responding to the demands of people with disabilities by creating legislation mandating equal treatment of individuals throughout society, regardless of individual disability. These state actions represent a concrete and pragmatic attempt to better the lives of people with disabilities by removing the barriers that prevent equal access to the American dream. Unfortunately, while these actions may intend to secure a social world free of discrimination, often times they serve to perpetuate the same notions of injustice the policy was intended to combat. Recent history provides numerous examples of legislation intending to affirm the communal demands of people with disabilities, while discursively constructing these individuals according to a rhetorical structure of terminology which denies equality, reifies stigma, and mandates dehumanization. **The rhetorical structure of disease-centric terminology** deployed in these legislative texts **places a primacy on the individuals’ disability,** while **rendering all other claims of identity and personhood** a mere **afterthought.** Historically, examples of disease-centric rhetoric in legislation include the singular terms of “mongoloid,” “lunatic,” “retard,” “imbecile,” and “cripple.” More recently, legislative examples include **the terms** “disabled child,” “schizophrenic patient,” and the generic all inclusive **“disabled people.”** While **modern examples** of legislation avoiding disease-centric rhetoric **in favor of** the more empowering rhetorical structure **“people-first language” can be found**, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, yet these examples are far from the textual norm in modern legislation. 3

Harmful rhetoric justifies the holistic destruction of people with disabilities. **ROBERTS (2)[[2]](#footnote-2):**

The rhetoric surrounding disability, particularly as it is embodied in recent Congressional legislation, is an area ripe for criticism and study. **The inherent social negativity and connotation of difference associated with** the term **“disability”** itself, along with **the ways** in which **that term is deployed to categorize individuals** for no other reason than falling outside the social norms of a given time, **circumscribes the rhetoric** of disability **within a unique sphere of power.** Historically, **the rhetoric of disability has exerted its power** overtly **as a justification for mass extermination of** entire **sections of a population**i ; allowed for state sponsored forced sterilization in the name of social progressii; and has been actively deployed in an effort **to link** nearly all **social minorities with defect** and inferiority so **to bolster legitimacy for their oppression**. Given **the propensity for** the **rhetoric of disability to play** an integral role **in violence and atrocity**, how then is it possible to maintain an infinite commitment to creating a better world for people with disabilities while simultaneously viewing the legislation aimed at pragmatically achieving such a goal under a lens of strict scrutiny for rejecting dangerous rhetoric? How then would it be possible to overcome the gap between the dangers presented by disease-centric rhetoric in what is “spoken” in legislative texts, and still affirm what is “said” by those same texts attempting to make pragmatic gains for people with disabilities in the spirit of equality?

We need to use people first language as a way to change the rhetorical prejudice we create against individuals with disabilities**. ROBERTS (3): “People first language” is a way of speaking and writing, about** individuals who are labeled as fitting within a category of “disabled.” People first language is a way of referencing **individuals who are physically or mentally disabled** in some way (Tyler, 1993). One example of people first language would be to reference a person traditionally labeled a “schizophrenic” as a person with schizophrenia. In this example the use of people first language of “person with schizophrenia” replaces the traditional medical label of “schizophrenic.” People first language emerged, partially in reaction to, a time when individuals with disabilities were commonly labeled as “mongoloids” or “retards” (Foreman, 2005). **People first language acts as a way to replace such offensive and degrading forms of speech** in reference to individuals with disabilities with a more compassionate and correct schema **that acknowledges that individuals with disabilities are first and foremost people** (Foreman, 2005). People first language **attempts to avoid the notion that individuals with disabilities are inherently “flawed,”** (Ussher, 1992) **that individual’s disabilities define the entirety of their being** (Komissar, 1995). Additionally, people first language attempts to **detach disability from the individual**, **the notion that disability is firmly rooted within the individual rather than alternative structures which produce, define, and chain individuals to** a **singular conception of being or identity** (Shepherd, 2003). This detachment calls into question the origin of disability, if individuals themselves are ever actually mentally ill, or if society creates the illness within individuals.

It’s mutually exclusive – you cannot divorce yourself from the discourse that you utilize. That would be severing from his reps. **VINCENT[[3]](#footnote-3):** Charles Mills argues that “the moral concerns of African Americans have centered on the assertion of their personhood, a personhood that could generally be taken for granted by whites, so that blacks have had to see these theories from a location outside their purview.” For example, I witnessed a round at a tournament this season where a debater ran a utilitarianism disadvantage. His opponent argued that this discourse was racist because it ignores the way in which a utilitarian calculus has distorted communities of color by ignoring the wars and violence already occurring in those communities.  In the next speech, the debater stood up, conceded it was racist, and argued that it was the reason he was not going for it and moved on, and still won the debate.  This is problematic because it demonstrates exactly what Mill’s argument is. For the black debater this argument is a question of his or her personhood within the debate space and the white debater was not held accountable for the words that are said.  Again for debaters of color, their performance is always attached to their body which is why it is important that the performance be viewed in relation to the speech act. Whites **[Some]** are allowed to **take for granted the impact their words have on the bodies in the space. They** take for granted this notion of personhood and **ignore the concerns of those** who do not matter **divorced from the flow**. It is never a question of “should we make arguments divorced from our ideologies,” it is a question of is it even possible. It is my argument that our performances, regardless of what justification we provide, are always a reflection of the ideologies we hold. Why should a black debater have to use a utilitarian calculus just to win a round, when that same discourse justifies violence in the community they go back home to? **Our performances** and our decisions in the round, **reflect the beliefs that we hold when we go back to our communities.** As a community we must re-conceptualize this distinction the performance by the body and of the body by re-evaluating the role of the speech and the speech act. It is no longer enough for judges to vote off of the flow anymore. Students of color are being held to a higher threshold to better articulate why racism is bad, which is the problem in a space that we deem to be educational. It is here where I shift my focus to a solution.  **Debaters must be held accountable for the words they say** in the round. We should no longer evaluate the speech. Instead **we must begin to evaluate** the speech act itself. Debaters must be held accountable for more than winning the debate. They must be held accountable for **the implications of that speech. As educators and adjudicators** in the debate space **we also have an ethical obligation** to foster an atmosphere of education. **It is not enough for judges to offer predispositions** suggesting that they do not endorse racist, sexist, homophobic discourse, or justify why they do not hold that belief, **and still offer a rational reason why they voted for it**.  Judges have become complacent in votingon the discourse, if the other debater does not provide a clear enough role of the ballot framing, or does not articulate well enough why the racist discourse should be rejected. Judges must be willing to foster a learning atmosphere by holding debaters accountable for what they say in the round. They must be willing to vote against a debater if they endorse racist discourse. They must be willing to disrupt the process of the flow for the purpose of embracing that teachable moment. The speech must be connected to the speech act. We must view the entire debate as a performance of the body, instead of the argument solely on the flow. Likewise, judges must be held accountable for what they vote for in the debate space. If a judge is comfortable enough to vote for discourse that is racist, sexist, or homophobic, they must also be prepared to defend their actions. We as a community do not live in a vacuum and do not live isolated from the larger society. That means that judges must defend their actions to the debaters, their coaches, and to the other judges in the room if it is a panel. Students of color should not have the burden of articulating why racist discourse must be rejected, but should have the assurance that the educator with the ballot will protect them in those moments. **Until** we re-conceptualize the speech and the speech act, and until **judges are comfortable enough to vote down debaters for a performance that perpetuates violence** in the debate space, **debaters and coaches alike will remain complacent in their privilege.**As educators we must begin to shift the paradigm and be comfortable doing this. As a community **we should** stop looking at ourselves as isolated in a vacuum and **recognize that the discourse** and knowledge **we produce** in debate **has real implications for how we think when we leave this space.**Our performances must be viewed as of the body instead of just by it. As long as we continue to operate in a world where our performances are merely by bodies, we will continue to foster a climate of hostility and violence towards students of color, and in turn destroy the transformative potential this community could have.

The aff only seeks to destroy the lives of the persons with disabilities by continuing to discard them into the medical stereotypes they are already part of. **SNOW[[4]](#footnote-4):** *Words matter!* **Old and inaccurate descriptors perpetuate negative stereotypes** and generate an incredibly powerful attitudinal barrier—***the greatest obstacle facing individuals with disabilities.* A disability is,** first and foremost, ***a medical diagnosis,* and when we define people by their diagnoses, we devalue and disrespect them as individuals**. Do *you* want to be known primarily by your psoriasis, gynecological history, or the warts on your behind? **Using medical diagnoses incorrectly—as a measure of a person’s abilities or potential—*can ruin people’s lives.***

extra cards:

A. Text: Do the aff, but reject its manner of referring of those who are purportedly disabled as “disabled people […]” in favor of a method based in people first language. **DIN**[[5]](#footnote-5): Do the words used to describe *you* have an impact on *your life?* You bet! Contrary to the age-old "sticks and stones" lesson we learned as children, **words*do* matter!** For too long, **people who** happen to **have conditions we call "disabilities" have been subjected to devaluation, marginalization, prejudice**, and more. And **the first way to devalue someone is through language, by using words** or labels **to identify a** person/**group as "less-than**," as "the others—not like us," and so forth. **Once a** person/**group has been identified this way, it makes it easier to justify prejudice and discrimination. Our language shapes our attitudes**; our attitudes shape our language; they're intertwined. And our attitudes and language *drive our actions!* **Using People First Language—putting the person before the disability—and eliminating old, prejudicial, and *hurtful* descriptors, can move us in a new direction. People First Language** is not political correctness; instead, it **demonstrates good manners**, respect, the Golden Rule, and more—***it can change the way we see a person, and it can change the way a person sees herself!***

the PIC constitutes a recognition of terminology in the constructing the self-identities of persons with disabilities – THEY ARE people first, not defective things first. **SNOW (2):**

*Embrace a new paradigm:* “**Disability is a natural part of the human experience**...” (*U.S. Developmental Disabilities/Bill of Rights Act).* Yes, *dis- ability is natural,* and **it can be redefined as a “body part that works differently.”** A person with spina bifida has legs that work differently, a person with Down syndrome learns differently, and so forth. **People can no more be defined by their medical diagnoses than others can be defined by gender, ethnicity, religion,** or other traits! A diagnosis may also be used as a *sociopolitical pass- port* for services, entitlements, or legal protections*.* Thus, the *only places* where the use of a diagnosis is relevant are medical, educational, legal, or similar settings. **People First Language puts the person before the disability, and describes what a person has, not who a person is.**Are you “cancerous” or do you have cancer? **Is a person “handicapped/disabled” or does she “have a disability”? Using a diagnosis as a defining characteristic reflects prejudice, and also robs the person of the opportunity to define himself.** Let’s reframe “problems” into “needs.” Instead of, “He has behavior problems,” we can say, “He needs behavior supports.” Instead of, “She has reading problems,” we can say, “She needs large print.” “Low-functioning” *or* “high-functioning” are pejorative and harmful. Machines “function;” people live! And let’s eliminate the “special needs” descriptor—it generates pity and low expectations! **A person’s self-image is tied to the words used about him.** People First Language reflects good manners, not “political correctness,” and it was started by individuals who said, *“We are not our disabilities!”* We can create a new paradigm of disability and change the world in the process. Using People First Language is right—*just do it, now!*

1. Roberts, Jeff. The rhetorical structure of disability: bridging the gap between what is' spoken'and what is' said'with song-over-signifying with personhood against the backdrop of disease-centric discourse. Diss. 2007.  
    [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Roberts, Jeff. The rhetorical structure of disability: bridging the gap between what is' spoken'and what is' said'with song-over-signifying with personhood against the backdrop of disease-centric discourse. Diss. 2007.  
    [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. (Christopher Debate Coach, former college NDT debater “Re-Conceptualizing Our Performances: Accountability In Lincoln Douglas Debate” <http://victorybriefs.com/vbd/2013/10/re-conceptualizing-our-performances-accountability-in-lincoln-douglas-debate)> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Few Words About People First language by Kathie Snow Visit www.disabilityisnatural.com to see the original, full-length article. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://www.disabilityisnatural.com/explore/people-first-language [↑](#footnote-ref-5)