

Embracing Enablement: Impairment, Community and Disability Identity in Young Adult Fiction

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Abstract—Many authors in recent years have worked to encourage the inclusion of disabled people and to show disability characters in a positive light. In order to accomplish this, they tend to produce counter-disability characters and scenarios to promote enablement. This textual analysis focuses on three young adult fictions that provide positive portrayals of protagonists with disability, including *Out of My Mind* (Draper, 2010), *Five Flavors of Dumb* (John, 2010) and *Jerk, California* (Friesen, 2008). Drawing on the social identity theory and the social model, this paper explores how the protagonists' disability identities are formed. Three themes emerged from the textual analysis: impairment and identity, which looked at the complex interactions between impairment and identity; community transformation, which analyzed factors causing both socially constructed disability and positive interaction; and positive disability identity, which examined how protagonists navigate challenges and form positive identity. This study may offer recommendations for educators, parents, and researchers who might utilize this study to advance and build an inclusive society.

Index Terms—disability, positive identity formation, young adult literature, textual analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

In the past, the majority of the depictions of disability in the literature were constrictive and negative, and some are meant to arouse sympathy and sentimentality in readers, as characters with impairments have often played important roles in the moral growth or served as literary allegory (Dyches & Prater, 2000). One of the few analyses of the representation of disability in American children's literature from the nineteenth century argues that characters with disability play a passive role in the plot, serving to motivate or persuade the real actors (Little, 1986). The ableist method for dealing with socially conditioned childhood development and evaluating the behaviour of fictional characters, which posits a character trajectory that advances towards agency and independence, lies behind these perceptions of the disabled child as a "stock figure" (Stuckey, 2019). Also, many young adult fictions featured disability as the main issue, while the normality narratives that appear in print and screen media lead to constrictive or oppressive representations of disability (Mitchell & Snyder, 2014). Recent advancements in childhood studies have emphasized the importance for the humanities to earnestly examine the portrayal of seemingly stereotypical characters who, as Anna Mae Duane suggests, require a genuine acknowledgment of their experiences, promoting authentic interdependence rather than an illusion of independence (Altschuler, 2014; Duane, 2013). Therefore, in general, academics have seen a rise in the number of novels portraying characters with disabilities who are more independent, playing more caring and teaching roles, and participate in more inclusive leisure activities, highlighting their contributions to society, developing reciprocal relationship with others, and showing that characters with disabilities are granted equal citizenship rights (Dyches et al., 2009). In this study, I draw on three books with a disability theme, which feature detailed, complex and some positive portrayals of people with disabilities. These novels are *Jerk, California* (Friesen, 2008), *Out of My Mind* (Draper, 2010) and *Five Flavors of Dumb* (John, 2010), which were marketed to young adults, specifically those between the ages of 13 and 17, and were written in the genre of contemporary realistic fiction. These books, which were just given the Schneider Family Book Award, provide intricate and accurate depictions of people with disabilities. We highlight the use of these texts to addresses the disability identity and provide reference for teachers, caregivers, and scholars who may refer to our research to promote a more inclusive community.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Social Identity

We employed the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), claiming that collective identities have significant impact on human behavior, to theorize the integration of the social model and the disability identity (Hutchinson et al., 2018). Social identity theory provides an approach through which to explore the social identity, relationships between

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groups, and analyze the process of pursuing senses of belonging within groups (Harris et al., 2014; Hogg et al., 1995). Social groups refer to groups of people who recognize themselves as belonging to the same societal category or have a common identity. The term "in-group" refers to those who share similarities with the self; "out-group" refers to those who differ from the self and are identified through social comparison (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Also, individuals can belong to a variety of social groups, each of which has a different level of value to them personally (Hogg et al., 1995).

When a group identity is activated, people act in a way that enhances the notion of the in-group compared to the out-group, which enhances their own perception of themselves as group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This procedure aims to improve and maintain self-esteem (Turnbull, 1995). When individuals' identity changes, they are no longer seen by themselves or others as possessing the necessary traits to fall under a particular social group. Changes in categorization can also have an impact on a person's sense of self since they are no longer seen as conforming to social norms (Beart et al., 2005). The reason why people prefer their own group over outgroups is that maintaining a positive and secure sense of self was the main impetus for competitive intergroup activities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). If individuals are driven to maintain a positive self-concept, they would also be promoted to hold a positive view of their respective organizations (Turnbull, 1995).

To sum up, social identity theory is a psychological theory developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979) that explains how a person's self-concept and identity are shaped by their membership in social groups. People categorize themselves into various social groups according to common features such as race, gender, religion, nationality, and disability and derive their self-esteem and sense of identity from the groups they belong to. Tajfel considered social identity theory to be fundamentally a theory of social change. The need for a secure and positive self-concept is what motivates competitive intergroup activities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Individuals who are motivated to maintain positive self-concept may also be driven to have a positive perspective of their organizations. This is because group members are compelled to behave and think in a manner that promotes the positive distinctiveness of their group from relevant outgroups, thereby working towards a positive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Therefore, according to SIT, achieving, preserving, and defending a positive self-concept involves a continuous process that involves combating biases in behavior, attributions, stereotypes, and memories (Harris et al., 2014).

B. The Social Model

Since the 1970s, the social model of disability, which focuses on the lack of fit between the body and the physical, social, and attitude environment (Goering, 2002), has grown in popularity. A fundamental tenet of this view is that the environment prevents people from participating fully in society and gaining access to opportunities (Preston, 2010). The social model suggests that disability is due to political, social, and economic factors rather than a personal deficiency or defect (Barnes & Mercer, 2010; Oliver, 2013). It acknowledges that there are a variety of social obstacles that persons with disabilities must overcome. These obstacles can prevent them from accessing healthcare, work, education, and other facets of life. Disability is viewed as a social construction, and there is a correlation between discriminatory actions and attitudes of others. The literature on disabilities places a strong emphasis on the harm that prejudice, trauma, and social stigma do to an individual's sense of self (Swain & French, 2000).

Compared with the social model of disability, which has been the subject of many researches, the combination of it with the social identity theory and has received less attention. The social model of disability and social identity theory are interwoven, especially in respect to people with disabilities constructing their identities in response to the limitations they experience in society. The social model can be used to comprehend how identity and disability interact and how disabled individuals can create identities that confirm their value and worth (Hutchinson et al., 2018). The way an individual perceives themselves is also shaped by social influences and that it is always changing (Rhodes et al., 2008). The social model also helps to identify societal barriers and inequities that have negative effects on all facets of life (Hornsey, 2008) and emphasizes that environmental and social barriers prevent persons with disability from full participation in society, instead of just being a problem with a person's health or medical issues. Disability is therefore perceived as a social construct rather than a tragic human experience. In this situation, a person's disability can be viewed as a contributing factor to their identity rather than their defining quality. Adopting a positive and affirmative disabled identity can enable individuals to transcend the limitations imposed by social and cultural norms, and to affirm their experiences, values, and identities.

Our research examined three young adult novels that portray protagonists with such impairments as Tourette syndrome, deafness and cerebral palsy to examine the connections between socially constructed disability, impairment, and positive social identity. To better understand the influence of social phenomena related to the experiences associated with disability in young adults, we combined the concepts of the social identity and the social model of disability in our research.

III. ANALYZING DISABILITY IN TEXTS

There were three major themes that emerged: Impairment and identity investigated the complex interactions that contribute to identity transformation. Communities looked into the elements that influence socially constructed disability as a result of the positive and negative interactions with their environment. Positive disability identity

formation took into account the former two factors and how these protagonists navigate challenges imposed by disability to form positive identity.

A. *Impairment and Identity*

People with impairments encounter challenges causing complicated influences to their identity transformation. According to the social model, a disability is socially produced because of society views that turn physical, mental, or a combination of these problems into a disability (Barnes & Mercer, 2011; Oliver, 2009), as individuals generally assess themselves and others based on how they differ from them, which creates obstacles to social inclusion (Barnes & Mercer, 2010; Oliver, 2013). These three novels are full of rich descriptions about protagonists' experiences, demonstrating the interaction between identity and impairments.

The significant impact of Sam's impairments, specifically his Tourette's syndrome, on his life and identity is evident in *Jerk, California* (Friesen, 2008), emphasizing the strong relationship between impairment and identity. The negative attitudes of others, leading to dehumanization, stereotyping, discrimination, and exclusion, are exemplified through Sam's experiences. A neurological condition known as Tourette's is characterized by tics, which are recurrent, involuntary movements and vocalizations. One of the ways that Sam's impairments affect him is through the stigma and discrimination he faces from others. Because of his tics, Sam is called a "jerk" in his hometown of Moorcroft, Minnesota, and frequently feels lonely and excluded from his neighbourhood. Bill, his stepfather, does despise him as a result of it. He often snaps at his wife, be it physically, emotionally, or verbally, if he sees Sam jerking or blurting. Sam's math teacher urges him to leave the classroom as he is "distracting the class". When his motor tics flare up, a woman in a bookshop accuses him of being a monster after he knocks several books from a shelf and one of them unintentionally hurts her son. Sam struggles mightily to keep his tics under control, but he usually fails, and this tends to make him feel frustrated and helpless. This demonstrates how Sam perceives himself as being continuously scrutinized and judged, and how his tics might cause him to feel different or abnormal. "The words wash over me like a shower, ... In my mind I see them—Jerky, Loser, Retard" (Friesen, 2008, p. 263). Sam's experiences in *Jerk, California* emphasize the complex interactions between disability, society perceptions, and the development of disability identity. The disparaging remarks and treatment Sam received highlight the negative impact of societal stigma on people with disabilities. These unfavourable views result in feelings of shame, inferiority, and loneliness and obstruct the growth of a good sense of self. The social model contends that hurdles and discrimination that prohibit people with disabilities from fully participating in society, rather than actual impairments, are what lead to disability. Disability can be shaped by impairments, which impact individuals' physical capabilities and their capacity to meet societal expectations regarding physical functioning (Jenkins & Webster, 2021). Sam's struggles and the effects of his impairments show that societal attitudes and the opportunities for inclusion or exclusion that exist in a particular context have a significant impact on disability identity.

In *Out of My Mind* (Draper, 2010), Melody's cerebral palsy-related impairments have a major impact on her identity and daily life, highlighting both the persistent problems she experiences and the transformative potential to challenge society stereotypes and foster her self-expression. Melody's impairments make it difficult for her to finish everyday tasks, such as eating and dressing, without assistance. She has limited mobility and uses a wheelchair to move around, contributing to her sense of isolation from her peers. In the initial stages of the book, Melody mentions the profound influence of her impairment on the trajectory of her life: "I can't talk. I can't walk. I can't take myself to the bathroom. Big bum" (Draper, 2010, p. 3). The greatest challenge faced by Melody is that because she is unable to speak, her intelligence is underestimated. These kids see Melody as "other," and their main reaction to her noises and jerky movements is discomfort. She can, however, remember dates, numbers, and events. She learns things quickly, and she can think more logically than a scientist. As it says on the book cover, Melody feels like a fish out of water. Her exceptional mind does not match well with the ignorance of the outside world. "My arms and legs get all tight and lash out like tree limbs in a storm. Even my face draws up" (Draper, 2010, p. 15). She has difficulty speaking clearly and needs to rely on a communication device to express herself, which always make her feel that she is not able to fully convey her thoughts and emotions to those around her. "He said loudly and slowly, as if I were hard of hearing and really stupid" (Draper, 2010, p. 19). The communication difficulties she faces often lead to underestimation and misunderstandings from her peers and teachers, who assume that her physical limitations also equate to intellectual limitations. This highlights the detrimental impact of others' perceptions on Melody, reinforcing the socially constructed notion of her disablement and limiting her opportunities for full participation and contribution. Ableism, which refers to social oppression, discrimination, stereotyping to people with disability, threatens their well-being (Hutchinson et al., 2018). Consequently, she is frequently subjected to differential treatment due to her cerebral palsy, which fosters social categorization into an "out-group". These unfavourable perceptions have a substantial detrimental impact on her self-confidence and self-esteem, impeding her progress towards self-acceptance and a positive disability identity.

Piper's disability is clearly portrayed as having a substantial influence on her communication, identity, and sense of self-worth in the novel *Five Flavors of Dumb* (John, 2010). Young and deaf, Piper is in her final year of high school when the story begins. Piper is asked to serve as the band's manager by the lead singer of Dumb, a rock group made up of pupils from her school. She faces management challenges with the "Dumb" high school hard rock band. She uses lip reading and hearing aids to get by in her senior year of high school, which can make some social situations

uncomfortable for her. This book emphasizes the major challenges that deaf people encounter as well as their capacity to defy preconceptions and assert their strengths. She experiences considerable difficulties speaking with people since she is a deaf person. In order to understand what is going on around her, Piper always relies on textual or visual communication throughout the book as she fights with feeling excluded from conversations and activities. This illustrates how deafness can obstruct social connection and participation, which is draining and unpleasant for Piper. "I felt like I'd been judged and found to be inadequate, a problem beyond remedy. But even that wasn't the worst thing. "Alone. It makes me feel alone."" (John, 2010, p. 42). The impairment Piper experiences impacts her identity and sense of value. She is acutely aware of the negative stereotypes and prejudices that exist towards individuals with disabilities, and she feels as though her deafness is what defines her in the eyes of others. This causes her to feel insecure and self-doubting, and it makes it challenging for her to assert herself and demand the respect and recognition she deserves.

In conclusion, the novels *Jerk, California*, *Out of My Mind*, and *Five Flavors of Dumb* provide powerful narratives that illuminate the complex relationship between impairment and identity. These experiences highlight the considerable obstacles that people with disabilities encounter in their day-to-day activities, social relationships, and self-perception. Due to the stigma, marginalization, and prejudice that Sam, Melody, and Piper experience as a result of their disabilities, they experience feelings of loneliness, resentment, and self-doubt. Our findings highlighted that, regardless of the impairment types, discriminatory and social stereotypical behaviors may be influenced by the medical model that regard impairment as worthless and abnormal (Loja et al., 2013), triggering self-valued identity. Impairments are frequently perceived individual predicament or misfortune rather than a phenomenon influenced by social factors that may be modified to improve enablement (Galvin, 2005; Swain & French, 2000). Many people find it difficult to challenge discriminatory actions because their value as individuals is reduced in social contexts (Edwards & Imrie, 2003; Galvin, 2005). Therefore, these characters' socially created disabilities are a result of other people's negative views and prejudices, which restrict their ability to fully participate in society and express themselves.

B. Community

This issue investigates the environmental and social elements that contribute to socially constructed disability and identity negotiation in people with disability. Specific characteristics influence how people are identified by others, and people are frequently pushed from one communal group to another. This part is developed with two themes: socially constructed disability investigated the outcomes of discriminatory and stereotypical behaviors that affect one's social standing and connections with others while positive social interactions investigated how social interactions provide positive experiences and lifestyle changes that promote positive identity formation.

(a). Socially Constructed Disability

People's perceptions of themselves are greatly influenced by their social interactions, and if those interactions are favorable, they can positively affect their identity in it (Galvin, 2005). The relationship between the people with an impairment and surroundings is notably challenging while coping with unfavorable labels, stigma and stereotypes (Lundberg et al., 2011).

In the novel *Out of My Mind*, the socially constructed disability faced by Melody is perpetuated by the attitudes and reactions of those around her. Throughout her journey, Melody encounters numerous challenges and experiences both triumphs and setbacks that reflect the intricate relationship between her socially constructed disability and her identity. Melody's physical restrictions further compound her challenges as she navigates through the environment, encountering numerous barriers on a daily basis. She has a tough time navigating the surroundings due to her physical limitations, and she constantly faces difficulties. "People stared. Some pointed. Others looked away" (Draper, 2010, p. 17). The plot takes a turn when Melody and her mother, accompanied by the Brooks family and Mrs. V, embark on a trip to participate in the Whiz Kids national finals. However, their plans are disrupted by a flight cancellation due to bad weather. Melody feels abandoned by her team, who managed to transfer to another flight earlier. Despite this disappointment, Melody's father informs her the next morning that her team finished eighth in the D.C. finals and presents her with a small trophy. Determined to prove herself and reunite with Catherine, Melody decides to return to school and participate in her quiz team. Melody tries to prove herself and demonstrate off her skills despite the obstacles she confronts. Her resolve to assert her identity beyond her impairment is evident in her choice to go back to school and compete with the other members of her quiz team.

The prejudice, stigma, and discrimination faced by Sam due to his Tourette's syndrome in *Jerk, California* hinders his social participation, limits his possibilities, and reinforces negative self-perception. Sam constantly encounters the prejudice, stigma, and discrimination because of his Tourette's syndrome in *Jerk, California*. Sam, a gifted runner who is about to graduate from high school, is alienated from the other residents of his tiny town as a result of his Tourette's condition. He experiences emotional abuse from his stepfather, Old Bill, and becomes the subject of bullying by some of his classmates inside the walls of his high school. Sam's self-confidence suffers as a result of his incorrect belief that his Tourette's is the only trait he inherited from his deceased biological father. His pain is further exacerbated by the constant bullying he experiences at school when exhibiting his tics. His stepfather's disregard for his impairment, which causes him to be constantly referred to in negative terms and treated as an outsider, exacerbates his difficulties. Due to his tics, he is frequently called a "jerk" by residents of his hometown of Moorcroft, which prevents him from participating in many social activities. "I don't want sympathy, ... And I hate talking to anyone who has it—hate the me

I see in them" (Friesen, 2008, p. 172). Sam's experiences show how society categorizes people with impairments and assigns them to particular social groups. Self-categorization of individuals with disabilities at the interpersonal level involves comparisons within their group, varying depending on specific subgroups and dimensions considered (Finlay & Lyons, 2000). This societal categorization can worsen challenges faced by people with disabilities and reinforce prejudices, limiting their prospects for social engagement and self-fulfillment.

The pervasive societal and negative perceptions of deafness encountered by Piper in *Five Flavors of Dumb* not only create significant challenges for her but also undermine her sense of self-worth and agency. Piper's relationship with her parents is intricate and multifaceted, characterized by her feelings of resentment towards her mother and the distant, resentful demeanor of her father. This complexity arises from their treatment of Piper's younger sister, Grace, who was born deaf and underwent an expensive transplant funded by money taken from Piper's college trust. In a society that puts a high emphasis on spoken language and verbal communication, Piper's deafness can make her feel excluded from conversations, events, and social interactions. It also affects her internal sense of identity and self-worth. "No offense, but shouldn't the manager of a rock band have perfect hearing?" (John, 2010, p. 34). Piper's father sees Piper as abnormal even though he does not use the word "disabled" openly.

(b). *Positive Social Interactions*

Positive identity transformation may be significantly promoted by how the community views and comprehends disabilities positively. A systemic shift towards valuing and acknowledging a disabled identity could counteract socially constructed disability and promote social inclusion and enablement (Hutchinson et al., 2018).

In *Five Flavors of Dumb*, Piper's identity as a deaf person are also significantly influenced by her cultural and positive social interactions, which have impacts on her views, relationships, and sense of self. Research suggests that the sense of connectedness provided by ingroups can have an empowering role both personally and collectively, indicating higher commitment and greater self-esteem to social change actions (Bakouri & Staerklé 2015). Seattle, where *Five Flavors of Dumb* is based, has a thriving music scene and a progressive culture. Even though Piper's deafness is not directly tied to the city, the setting has an impact on how people see and treat her, which in turn affects how she feels about herself. The attitudes and actions of those close to Piper have an impact on her in various ways. With the band, Piper has a sense of belonging and a sense of purpose, and she discusses how these interactions have a good social impact by erecting walls and creating bridges between people with various backgrounds and experiences. A study on the social identity approach to disability suggests that the social category of disability has a vital role in the psychological experience of impairment. The study contends that in order to fully understand the social psychological experience of disability, a link between the critical epistemological viewpoints present in disability studies and the methodological rigor, theoretical depth (Dirth & Branscombe, 2018). *Dumb* aids Piper in coming to terms with who she is as a person. She gets more resilient, stronger, and accepting of who she is and what she is capable of. She no longer feels the need to constantly hide and is less frightened to take risks. This demonstrates the beneficial effects of relationships and social connections on Piper's identity, assisting her in feeling welcomed, encouraged, and appreciated as a person. Through her interactions with the band and her friendships, Piper develops a sense of community and connection that transcends boundaries and bolsters her sense of self.

The profound influence of Sam's interactions with the people and environment of *Jerk, California*, leads to a transformative journey of self-discovery and a reevaluation of his self-perception and place in the world. Following the culmination of enduring torment from his stepfather, Sam leaves his home in a rage and starts roaming around the town. Sam's only request was to be treated similarly to them rather than as an outlier. Eventually, a man called "George the coot" takes Sam in and gives him a job. Sam often refers to George as his best friend because he was the first to do that and didn't treat Sam any differently than he would have if he hadn't had tourettes. After George's unexpected death, Sam departs from his hometown and travels to Jerk, California, across the country. He sets off on a voyage of self-acceptance, love, and discovery of one's identity in the world. He starts to view himself as more than just his handicap when he meets Naomi, a girl who is able to appreciate him for who he is as a person. His father's old acquaintances greeted him with wide arms and had no issues with him when he went on the trip. Because of the more accepting people he meets there, he feels more at ease expressing himself and his tics in public. In this new setting, he can start to examine the unfavourable self-perception he has formed as a result of his experiences in Moorcroft. Sam discovers more about his family and lineage from Minnesota to California and finds that his stepfather had been lying to him about his father's life and death for a number of years. He also finds out that, despite having Tourette's himself, his father was a skilled craftsman, a devoted husband and father. By the book's conclusion, Sam has accepted his Tourette's. He sleeps in the homes of his dad's former acquaintances while travelling and piecemeal discovers the truth about his identity, his father, and the love of his life. "How many years I hid, hid that word—the word I hate most in this world that could have set me free" (Friesen, 2008, p. 263). He is motivated to understand that it is possible to live a full life despite the limitations of the disability. His contacts with those around him, his experiences in both Minnesota and California, and his view of his place in the world are all factors that have impacts on how his identity has changed through time.

The supportive environment and influential relationships in *Out of My Mind* contribute significantly to Melody's personal growth and identity development. Novel experiences, teacher-student connections, and a supportive

community can impact identity development process profiles (Meerts-Brandtsma et al., 2023). Melody's surroundings significantly influence who she becomes by giving her chances to develop and learn. Melody receives significant help and inspiration from her family and professors to pursue her aspirations. Mrs. V. exemplifies the good impact that encouraging and supporting adults may have on a child's identity, particularly in terms of appreciating and recognizing a child's intelligence and willpower. "This is such a thrill, Melody! You were amazing out there! I'm so proud of our team and extremely proud of you" (Draper, 2010, p. 214). This demonstrates the beneficial impact of her teachers and classmates, who start to accept and respect her as a normal person rather than belittling her due to her physical limitations. By the conclusion of the fifth grade, Melody begins to wonder if perhaps she is not so unique after all. She might share some of the same concerns and viewpoints as other fifth graders. Through her interactions with her family, friends, and teachers, Melody learns to value herself for who she is, rather than for her physical limitations. "It is the first time in my entire life that I feel like I'm part of the group" (Draper, 2010, p. 142). In conclusion, her supportive family and teachers provide her with the opportunities and encouragement she needs to grow and develop her sense of self-worth. This is in line with the result from the study on experiential education programs showing that students who are prone to rumination may benefit especially from the supportive setting, which might increase the possibility that they express their and beliefs and values.

Overall, the theme of community discusses the experiences of people who changed from a place where they are incapable of forming connections and experiencing a sense of attachment to a different location that they are more accepted would have more control over personal associations, which can shape one's identity and self-worth in the community in which they reside. If individuals are members of marginalized groups, the biases of more powerful groups can influence the disabled individual's role in society (Reeve, 2004).

C. *Developing a Positive Disabled Identity*

Protagonists reflect on their impairments and how they develop a feeling of belonging and purpose and in their communities showed a more positive identity. We previously demonstrated how the impairments compelled a transformation in both one's self-identification, as a result of adapting to the disability and its impact on how one is perceived and interacts with others, due to socially constructed disability. The process of rebuilding one's social identity involves developing a positive self-image despite one's disability and rejecting the belief that medical treatment is the only solution (Swain & French, 2000). The non-tragic perspective on disability does not focus on "the problem," instead concentrating on disability as a positive identity for people as well as society as a whole, and on the lifestyles that persons with disabilities can lead (Swain & French, 2000).

The development of a positive disability identity is exemplified in Piper's unwavering determination to define herself beyond her deafness and showcase her competence and capability, as seen in her bold decision to manage a rock band despite lacking prior expertise. Through her willingness to step outside her comfort zone, face her limitations, and acquire new communication and problem-solving techniques, Piper experiences personal growth and gains confidence in her abilities, ultimately redefining societal perceptions of her. The social model of disability emphasizes the need to remove these barriers to enable disabled people to participate fully in society. Positive disability identity can be seen as a way for disabled people to reject the negative stereotypes and stigma associated with disability and to embrace their identity as a member of a marginalized group (Dirth, 2018). Despite the difficulties Piper faces as a deaf teenager in *Five Flavors of Dumb*, she is persistent in her efforts to establish herself as a competent and capable person because she is unwilling to let people define her by her impairment. Although having no prior expertise in the music band management, Piper grasps the chance to manage a rock band when it is presented to her. During the process, she has to face her own limitations and come up with new communication and problem-solving techniques as she navigates the complicated world of the music band. Gradually, she gains confidence in her skills and develops as a person as a result of these encounters. "But ever since I started with Dumb, people look at me differently" (John, 2010, p. 245). Meanwhile, her friendship with her best friend Ed supports her in identifying the gaps in their communication and seeking out alternative avenues for interpersonal interaction. Piper discusses the sense of community and purpose she feels with the band, emphasizing the positive societal impact of these connections in removing obstacles and creating bridges between those with various life experiences and backgrounds. "I had the feeling I'd earned that most elusive prize—his respect" (John, 2010, p. 102). Her encounters with the band members put her preconceptions about what it takes to be a good manager to the test and make her rethink her own priorities.

Sam's positive identity development in *Jerk, California* is motivated by his own self-evaluation and introspection. Sam's friendship with Naomi, a girl he meets while travelling to California, is one of the main external influences that causes Sam to undergo an identity transformation. Sam receives encouragement from Naomi who aids him in developing a more positive self-image. This helps Sam gain more self-worth and confidence as a result of her companionship and encouragement. Soon after Sam graduates from high school, his life changes. One of the stranger men in town, George, hires him. George knew Sam's father, for starters. Just as Sam is starting to inquire about his father, George passes away quite abruptly. Sam considers what he leaves behind to be invaluable. His grandfather's decision to take him on a road trip to California exposes Sam to new places and experiences, broadening his perspective and helps him to see the world in a different way. He gains a deeper perspective of himself and his place in the world thanks to the people he meets and the places he travels to along the way. This experience enables Sam to recognize his own potential and fosters pride in his identity. As he begins to view himself more positively and takes pleasure in his

disability identity, he feels more at ease expressing himself and his tics in public. Finally, through self-reflection, confidence-building, and personal maturity, he is able to alter his self-image and acquire a stronger sense of identity and purpose in the world. "I love my present," (Friesen, 2008, p. 309).

In *Out of My Mind*, despite Melody's physical restrictions, she aspires to be independent and to be respected by others. She pushes herself to study and grow since she wants to be independent, which contributes to her positive identity transformation. Positive disability identity can be seen as a way for disabled people to reject the negative stereotypes and stigma associated with disability and to embrace their identity as a member of a marginalized group (Bogart, 2023; Dirth, 2018). Melody ponders her emotions and experiences for a long period of time. Through her inner dialogue, she begins to recognize her own strengths and weaknesses, and to understand her own thoughts and feelings. "Maybe I'm not so different from everyone else after all" (Draper, 2010, p. 293). Melody reflects the positive influence of her own self-advocacy, as she asserts her own right to be treated as a capable and complex individual despite her physical impairments. A team from the school participates in the Whiz Kids tournament each year. Melody takes the actual exam and succeeds with yet another flawless score, earning a spot on the school squad. Melody receives an apology from Mr. Dimming for being underestimated. "I want to be able to use the system to talk like ordinary kids" (Draper, 2010, p. 137). Melody's internal drive to overcome challenges and achieve her objectives is a crucial element in her identity. She continues to push herself to succeed in spite of the many obstacles she faces. She redefines what it means to be disabled and empowers herself and other people with disabilities through her involvement in the "Whiz Kids" team. Her academic achievement and the opportunities that education affords her are also significant influences that determine her identity. Although she is often underestimated and misunderstood by her peers and teachers, who assume that her physical limitations also mean that she has intellectual limitations, the resilience and strength of Melody are also highlighted, showcasing her determination to overcome societal prejudices and perceptions of her disability. Therefore, despite facing obstacles and moments of disappointment, Melody asserts her voice and rejects the notion that her impairment limits her abilities.

The ability to control one's own identity development is regarded as important. These protagonists wanted not to be defined by their disabilities or what others felt they should be, but rather by what they could do, allowing for the constructive formation of a disabled self-concept. To develop a sense of personal autonomy, the protagonists displayed numerous methods that they challenged socially constructed disability in order to feel valued, resulting in the development of a positive self-concept that embraces disability as integral parts of their identity (Swain & French, 2000). Being treated fairly, gaining full participation in the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of a society were thought to be significant components in confirming positive disability identities. The perspective that does not see disability as a tragedy shifts the attention away from the challenges and instead emphasizes the potential of disability as a valuable aspect of individual and societal identity, promoting the idea of disabled individuals. In essence, impairment, which is social death and renders disabled individuals inoperable in a non-disabled society, offers a societal environment that empowers people with disabilities to surpass the constraints of able-bodied societal expectations and beliefs, and to validate their own experiences, values, and identities (Swain & French, 2000).

IV. CONCLUSION

Our findings take into account the formation of three protagonists' positive disability identity, influenced by factors including impairment and community. The first theme, 'impairment and identity,' explores how impairments disrupt in the normative life and influence identity formation.

Our findings suggest that accumulating deficits might have a considerable impact on both self and social identity, but impairments can also render disabled individuals' benefits. The major part of society learns about disability through socialization, interaction with impaired individuals, and, less frequently, personal experiences. Limited socialization with disabled individuals may result in undesirable societal stereotyping of impairments as a result of attitudes and behaviors connected to a general lack of awareness of various forms of impairments (Thomas & Milligan, 2015). Sometimes, it's not the impairment itself, but these expectations can lead to suffering. However, people with disabilities would have deeper understandings of injustices that other people face due to their personal experience with impairment. The writings of persons with disabilities show that having a disability from birth or developing one later in life can provide an unusual perspective on life that can be applied positively.

The second theme, 'community,' expands on how societal associations and interactions and the transformation of communities can have influences on people's identity formation. Disability identity is significantly shaped by social interactions and connections. Research has shown that social relationships and interactions, particularly in regard to social categorization and the emergence of group identities, can have significant effects on identity formation (Loja et al., 2013). The formation of a positive disability identity can be aided by positive interactions and connections with other people with disabilities and members of the community. Being selective in social contacts was regarded as crucial in order to control how others interacted with and perceived them, as unfavorable generalizations led to societal discrimination that could ultimately lead to self-discrimination and heightened disability (Reeve, 2004). The formation of positive disability identities and the development of supportive, inclusive communities can contribute to the well-being of individuals with disabilities and promote greater societal inclusion and equity. The development of positive

disability identities, which can foster better self-acceptance, resilience, and advocacy, is more common in people with disabilities who are part of supportive communities and have positive interactions with other people with disabilities.

The last theme, positive disability identity, examined how sociocultural and impairment factors work together to support the development of positive disability identities. Hahn (1997) points out that disability should be seen as an experience rather than a loss. Several social and personal elements, including the presence of support networks and relationships, exposure to the disability culture and community, and the availability of accommodations and resources that promote inclusion and involvement, can have an impact on one's sense of disability identity (Swain & French, 2000). The interaction of sociocultural and impairment factors can support people in developing a positive disability identity in addition to giving them opportunities to engage in fulfilling activities and relationships, foster a sense of belonging, and promote their self-efficacy and empowerment (Edwards & Imrie, 2003). Socializing with others who support this identity transformation can thus serve as enablement, enabling the process of renegotiation to take place with more confidence and freedom to be oneself (Galvin, 2005).

According to this study, it is possible to analyse how the protagonists overcome social obstacles and undergo positive identity change by combining the social identity theory with the social model of disability. Our findings indicate that socially constructed disability, as well as environmental interactions, may have an impact on the process of identity transition. Although impairment and community exert some negative influence on identity formation, positive social identities for disabled people, both individually and collectively, are determined by the benefits and positive influences of an impaired way of life. As this research's findings suggest, adopting the disability identity should not establish a precedent for societal construction of disability rather it should affirm an individual's self-worth (Brown & Addington-Hall, 2008), leading to appreciation for who they are and what they are capable of in their social environment (Reeve, 2004).

Socially constructed disability is not a personal issue, but a social one, and our theoretical perspective may help to raise understandings of the positive and negative social interactions that impact identity transformation. This new perspective may provide a deeper comprehension of the nature of one's life amid changing circumstances (Charmaz, 1999). Individuals experiencing altered routines and life styles at a time in their lives when social expectations are high see altering social interactions and self-worth within their living community. Contemporary young adult literature increasingly features characters with disabilities, which presents opportunities for secondary English teachers to expand their students' understanding of disability. This representation can be beneficial for students with disabilities to reflect their experiences and provides greater awareness of what constitutes a disability and how it relates to the able-bodied norm. Also, by demonstrating the difficulties involved in expressing a positive disability identity, it may be possible to increase public understanding of the social forces at play that prevent people from changing their identities.

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