

YOUR WAY, MY WAY, OUR WAY:
A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE OF YOUNG ADULT DISABILITY FICTION
SINCE THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

by
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By examining eighteen works of young adult fiction written since the late 1960's, it is demonstrated that the view of persons with disabilities in this literature has evolved. Further, writings dealing with the subject of persons with disabilities in young adult literature are addressed. Gradually, these books change from illness focused survival tales to action-centered novels in which main characters must deal with more issues than their disability alone. Further, these characters shift over time from striving to fit social norms to forcing society to deal with them on their own terms. However, a divergence from this pattern is noted in recent works focusing on characters with impairments newly defined in society, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and pathological gambling. These novels more closely follow the patterns for dealing with disability established in earlier novels than contemporary novels dealing with traditional disorders.

Headings:

Disability studies.

People with disabilities in literature.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Methodology	2
Literature Review	5
Examination of Works	22
Summary of Findings	92
Discussion of Findings in Relation to Scholarly Works	100
Discussion and Conclusions	101
Recommendations for Continued Research	101
Appendix A	103
Works Cited	104

Introduction

Approximately seven percent of young people ages five to seventeen have activity limitations due to one or more chronic health conditions (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 26). Despite the prevalence of disability affecting young persons in society, literature read by the young has often provided grossly inaccurate portrayals of individuals with disabilities. Well before Shakespeare's villainous Richard III, disability has served as a metaphor for personal as well as societal depravity in literature read by young adults. Even when characters with disabilities were not evil, they functioned, like Tiny Tim, more as moral reminders than as weighty protagonists in works of fiction. Over the past few decades, however, persons with disabilities have gained greater rights legally and socially. With their change in real world status, persons with disabilities have also experienced a shift in their fictional portrayal. Disability seems to have finally left the confines of literary device, allowing fictional persons with disabilities to function as actual characters rather than symbols.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has signaled a great change in the legal rights of persons with disabilities. This legislation makes accessible businesses, state agencies, and public areas once out of reach for many persons with impairments. However, increasing social awareness of individuals with disabilities and their difficulties did not begin with the ADA. Along with racial,

gender, and age related civil rights issues, advocacy for individuals with impairments began to take root in the 1960's. This activism has continued, giving rise in the succeeding decades to progress for individuals with disabilities such as 1975's passage of Public Law 94-142 (Education of All Handicapped Children Act). For U.S. children this law guaranteed free and suitable public education in the "least restrictive environment" possible.

Considering that the popular literature of a time period is often consulted in order to gain an understanding of the prevailing opinions of the time, one may wonder how the view of individuals with disabilities has altered in the literature of its time period. More specifically, since adolescence is viewed as a crucial time in which values and ethical systems are established, how has the literature for this age group changed in its presentation of characters with disabilities??

This shifting perspective on persons with disabilities in fiction is quite apparent in the relatively newly defined genre of young adult literature. This paper examines fiction for young adults written from the late 1960's to the present day. Changes in portrayal of the characters as well as subject matter are discussed. Scholarly works on disability fiction pertaining to each era are also presented.

Methodology

Publication dates of the eighteen books examined (see Appendix A for a complete list of novels discussed) span the last thirty-three years, a bit less time than young adult fiction has been a defined genre. All books were obtained from



either the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Information and Library Science Library or the Durham County (North Carolina) Library Main Branch. Due to the limited number of texts studied, this paper does not claim an exhaustive examination of young adult fiction centering on young adults with disabilities. However, in selecting texts focusing on a wide array of physical, neurological, and behavioral disabilities, this assessment intends to present as accurate as possible a picture of the evolving view of disability in young adult novels. Decided emphasis was placed upon selecting works dealing with varying impairments to provide a far reaching understanding of how disability as a category (rather than a specific impairment) is perceived in young adult fiction. Novels published prior to 1985 were selected from the landmark disability fiction bibliographies *Notes from a Different Drummer: A Guide to Juvenile Fiction Portraying the Handicapped* and its sequel, *More Notes from a Different Drummer*. Fiction from the mid 1980's to present was selected through library catalog searches of subject headings dealing with disability in young adult fiction. Where applicable, popular recognition and honors received by the novels are recorded; this recognition gives some indication of the societal influence of these particular young adult novels.

Only fiction featuring a protagonist with a disability is considered. While numerous young adult novels have supporting characters with disabilities, often these characters remain on the periphery and provide limited indication of their relationship with others. Though many of the texts revolve around teens with mobility impairments, novels dealing with young adults having cognitive and

emotional impairments are also discussed. By no means are all disabilities affecting individuals considered indistinguishable. However, due to the scope of this paper, the treatments of different disabilities in young adult fiction are examined rather than the disabilities themselves.

The novels are coded and then evaluated according to qualitative criteria established by the paper's author. The protagonists' relationships with family and friends are examined. In addition, societal reactions to individuals with disabilities in the novels are explored. The manner in which characters with disabilities deal with their impairments and societal reactions to them are considered. Also, the shifting use of language in reference to disability is discussed. These relationship and linguistic aspects are important in evaluating the texts due to the inter-personal and societal connections expressed by each and the view of popular society's conceptions they offer.

Novels are addressed in order of publication date from earliest to most recent; however, recent novels dealing with certain impairments that are relatively newly defined in medical literature are kept to the end of the examination. This shift from the chronological pattern of investigation is prompted by a thematic deviation between recent novels dealing with familiar disabilities (such as physical or visual impairments) and newly defined disorders (such as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). The importance of this deviation is best understood by examining those works separately from the other novels.

In addition to the examination of specific works of young adult fiction, relevant scholarly works are addressed. Although young adult fiction is the focus of this paper, many of the critical works reviewed include both child and young adult titles in their scope. These works are drawn from education, literary research, and disability studies publications. Findings from the fiction and scholarly literature examinations are then summarized and compared. In closing, future related research recommendations are offered.

Literature Review

Since the late 1960's, the number of works of child and young adult fiction featuring disabled characters has increased exponentially in comparison to works written previously (Baskin and Harris, 1977, 73-74). In addition, with the passage of Public Law 94-142, a greater critical interest has arisen in this fiction. In the following section, several works dealing with the portrayal of disabled characters in literature either written for or traditionally read by adolescents are discussed. The works are addressed chronologically in order to provide a feeling for the changing views of disability representation in literary scholarship and to provide perspective on works of fiction written at the same times as these pieces.

Late 1970's to Early 1980's

Many of the works written about disability fiction for young persons are bibliographies. These bibliographies usually offer plot summaries and brief commentary on child and young adult novels from a certain time period. The

landmark bibliography dealing with disability in fiction for the young is Baskin and Harris' *Notes from a Different Drummer: A Guide to Juvenile Fiction Portraying the Handicapped* published in 1977. Few subsequent publications dealing with disability's portrayal in child and young adult fiction have failed to reference this important work. *Notes from a Different Drummer* deals with child and young adult fiction from 1940 to 1975. In addition to offering an annotated guide to 311 titles, *Notes from a Different Drummer* also provides perspectives on society's changing relationship with persons who have disabilities, literary treatment of disability, information on the assessment and use of fiction about disabled individuals, and trends in child and young adult fiction over the 35 year period.

In *Notes from a Different Drummer*, the authors contrast older works of children's fiction dealing with disabilities with their more modern counterparts. It examines the romanticizing of disabled characters in older works (e.g. 1875's *The Little Lambe Prince and His Travelling Cloak* and 1899's *Heidi*) as uniformly noble, gentle, forgiving, and loving, but little else and compares this treatment to modern depictions of disabled characters as persons having varying, realistic emotions and motivations.

The authors also offer a hypothesis on the reasons behind the dramatic increase in child and young adult fiction featuring disabled characters. The impetus behind the increase in titles was twofold, Baskin and Harris conclude. On the literary front, "problem" stories for young adults became quite popular in the 1960's. These novels deal with issues formerly considered taboo such as "family fragmentation, social dislocations, and personal trauma" (74). Disability

stories fit into this new context well. On the social front, disability advocacy groups became more vocal and helped to raise public awareness of individuals with disabilities and their needs.

Baskin and Harris make note of changes in the types of disabilities portrayed in these works as well. Although they assert that no decisive information exists to explain why certain disabilities have been prevalent in fiction while others have not, they contend that history and visible manifestation were defining factors. Portrayals of blind and lame characters were popular in literature long before the 1940's and continued to be so while characters with very visible disabilities could be counted upon to draw sympathy from readers. Due to a call for increased realism and greater societal awareness in the 1960's, this trend has been changing and characters with cognitive impairments and a host of less evident disabilities are becoming more visible in child and young adult fiction (42-45).

In contrast, Fiedler examines the more malevolent side of disability's portrayal in traditionally young adult fiction with his lecture "Pity and Fear: Images of the Disabled in Literature and the Popular Arts." This lecture, presented during a 1981 literary symposium sponsored by ICD-International Center for the Disabled in collaboration with the United Nations, explores the treatment of literary characters with disabilities in such classics as *Jane Eyre*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Treasure Island*, *Moby Dick*, and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Fiedler maintains that certain "mythic elements" have long existed in women's literature. The first of these elements is the fantasy of having sexual

intercourse with a disabled man. Fiedler explains this allure as a “Beauty and Beast archetype” bred from the fascination in whether disabled men can have sex, how they have sex, and how it would feel to have intercourse with a disabled man. The second tableau he examines is the “Cinderella archetype” in which the story’s heroine only wins her prince after he is disabled. Fiedler points to *Jane Eyre* and *The Scarlet Letter* as examples of this genre. Fiedler states these stories imply that the best mate is one who is maimed and thereby symbolically castrated (6).

Fiedler then theorizes that depictions of disabled individuals in literature often are the result of non-disabled individuals’ paranoia about disabled persons. In portrayals such as *Moby Dick*’s one-legged Captain Ahab, *Treasure Island*’s likewise impaired Long John Silver, *The Scarlet Letter*’s deformed Roger Chillingworth, and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*’s Quasimodo, disabled persons are depicted as murderous, vicious, and vindictive. Fiedler maintains that “normal” persons’ feelings toward individuals with disabilities morph from pity to fear to hate and then to a projection onto individuals with disabilities that, because they are hated, they must hate in return. Further, these feelings of pity, fear, and mutual hate then give rise to the belief that disabilities are visible manifestations of internal evil (8).

The late 1970’s and early 1980’s research done by Baskin and Harris and Fiedler propose the view that the disability literature of preceding decades has proven untrue to the subject matter with which it has dealt. These authors address the social and political causes behind this trend and, in their respective

pieces, seek to make direct ties between the real world event or view and the fictional work. While Baskin and Harris do acknowledge that realism has become more prevalent in later works, they note that superficial or unrealistic attitudes towards individuals with disabilities were still common.

Mid 1980's

In 1984 Baskin and Harris produced an updated version of their original *Notes from a Different Drummer*, titling their new edition *More Notes from a Different Drummer: A Guide to Juvenile Fiction Portraying the Disabled* and examining works featuring disabled characters published in the years since the passage of P. L. 94-142. As the change in the title's nomenclature for persons with disabilities suggests, this book reflects the evolving perspective of individuals with disabilities present at the time of its publication. While the later edition in many ways mirrors its predecessor, Baskin and Harris do not simply rehash their original comments on juvenile disability fiction. Rather, they examine not only applicable fiction, but also relevant events of the interceding years.

Baskin and Harris first write about the process of using books featuring characters with disabilities to help mainstream persons with disabilities. Baskin and Harris cite studies supporting the use of literature to improve attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. Then, they take to task the less successful aspects of juvenile literature about persons with disabilities. Baskin and Harris point out that while most works of juvenile disability fiction are written with the best

intentions, many fall short of the mark of good literature because their message overpowers their story. These didactic works, Baskin and Harris assert, often feature characters that are so shallowly contrived that they become unbelievable.

Baskin and Harris go on to note the dramatic increase in the number of works of juvenile fiction dealing with persons with disabilities. They point out that in the original *Notes*, they cover a 36-year period and are only able to identify 311 relevant titles produced in that time span. In their follow up, they cover a six-year period (dating from the passage of P. L. 94-142) and identify 348 works produced in that short span alone. They account for this explosion by asserting that literature for children echoes adult concerns, thereby reflecting the intervening years' "impressive growth" in disability awareness.

The authors then contrast the types of disabilities most often seen in books featured in the original *Notes* with those present in its predecessor. Baskin and Harris note that in the first *Notes*, one-third of characters with disabilities have orthopedic disorders. Though characters with orthopedic disorders still dominate the survey, their proportion has dropped to approximately one in four. Characters with emotional impairments are also much more common in the works featured in the updated *Notes*. These impairments now comprise approximately seventeen percent of the disabilities affecting characters in the fiction surveyed. Baskin and Harris go on to point out that while certain impairments such as infantile paralysis have mostly disappeared from works of fiction, other disabilities like anorexia nervosa have become quite prevalent. This

shift in literary inclusion can be traced to the eradication of some illnesses and the identification of others.

Baskin and Harris continue to emphasize how societal changes influence the types of disabilities portrayed in fiction. They state that in the original edition of their book, blind characters frequently appeared in stories about African Americans to deliver messages about being blind to color. However, Baskin and Harris note that this convention has nearly disappeared from newer titles.

In 1985 Quicke published his bibliography *Disability in Modern Children's Fiction* in which he attempts to identify children's literature that helps expedite disabled individuals' integration into society. Unlike Fiedler and similar to the views published in Baskin and Harris' updated *Notes*, Quicke focuses on the positive effects of examining literature featuring characters with disabilities; however, Quicke questions the wisdom of his project and asks whether attempting to "separate out a body of literature dealing with 'disability' is itself a discriminatory act and counterproductive in terms of furthering integrationist ideals" (8). The bibliographer then goes on to argue against grouping fiction about disabled individuals according to disability since this may lead to an assumption that all persons with a certain disability have similar needs.

Quicke examines a theme previously mentioned by Baskin and Harris: the relative dominance in the area of disability fiction by books that feature visually or physically impaired characters. Quicke maintains that this prevalence of certain disabilities has continued in modern fiction due more to the public perception of the handicap and the influence of charitable organizations than to

the severity of the disability or the numbers of individuals affected by the disability (10).

The 1984 work of Baskin and Harris as well as Quicke's publication demonstrate a shift in the perception of disability literature for young people. Baskin and Harris and Quicke focus on the classroom use of literature featuring characters with disabilities. Rather than seeing this literature as moralistic (as in Baskin and Harris' 1977 publication and Fiedler's 1981 work), the two pieces produced in the mid-1980's show that disability literature had been recognized as a tool to aid in the mainstreaming of individuals with disabilities into the public school classroom. This shift is a huge one when considering that the perception of disability has gone from archetype to teaching aid in the space of a few short years.

Early to Mid 1990's

The next work examined, Robertson's *Portraying Persons with Disabilities: An Annotated Bibliography of Fiction for Children and Teenagers*, was published seven years after Quicke's *Disability in Modern Children's Fiction*. Although the publication addresses a similar topic, the conclusions of the author reflect the challenges encountered over the intervening years. While Quicke advocates the, at that time, emerging idea that literature can be used to facilitate the integration of individuals with disabilities into the classroom and society as a whole, Robertson deals with the effects of using such literature in the classroom. Robertson in her 1992 publication shares her fears about how certain innovations

in education may deter children's and young adults' reading of fiction featuring realistic portrayals of characters with disabilities. Robertson states that the "back to basics" curriculum and National Reading Initiative may in some ways be harmful to attitude changes that aid in the mainstreaming of persons with disabilities. These initiatives have often relied on literary "classics" written pre-1940 that depict persons with disabilities in a stereotypical fashion. Robertson argues that the prescriptive lists included in these initiatives "will need review and revision to include portrayals of disabilities that can maintain the momentum gained during P. L. 94-142's implementation" (38). However, Robertson does not advocate the removal of books that stereotype characters with disabilities. Rather, she believes that these books should be balanced by other selections that provide realistic portrayals of individuals with impairments.

Robertson analyzes trends in child and young adult fiction from 1982 to 1991 in respect to the portrayal of characters with disabilities. In reviewing the books included in her bibliography, Robertson concludes that orthopedic, neurological, and emotional impairments are the disabilities most often portrayed in fiction for teens and children during this period, echoing the findings in Baskin and Harris' 1984 publication. Robertson finds that these novels address such issues as newly disabled teens' social readjustment. Also, Robertson points out that novels at this time emphasize using correct terminology for neurological and orthopedic impairments; however, emotional disabilities are seldom identified.

In her 1994 article "Beyond the Stereotypes," Heim continues the educational focus begun by Quicke and furthered by Robertson. Heim takes the

next step by establishing criteria for considering books and developing her own brief bibliography of preferred works featuring characters with a disability. In her article, Heim recounts her own frustration at first finding few works featuring characters with mental impairments, and then discovering that these works often include stereotypical portrayals of characters with disabilities. Heim then sets forth five criteria by which child and young adult books featuring characters with mental impairments should be judged. These criteria include: accuracy of information, lack of stereotypes, literary quality, confrontation of the disability, and not exploiting characters with disabilities for the benefit of non-disabled characters. Heim offers six titles published since 1984 that she views as “exemplary” in these respects.

Accuracy is the abiding theme of the early to mid 1990’s works of Robertson and Heim. Both authors focus on the need for accurate portrayals of persons with disabilities in the classroom, whether that accuracy is achieved through instructor intervention in “classic” works or by presenting literary works that strive for realism. Classroom use of works featuring characters with disabilities is still the focus of these pieces; however, Robertson and Heim present the view that realism is imperative in the presentation of these works because non-disabled young people and their counterparts who have disabilities now interact in school and public settings (a situation different from the realities at the time of pieces such as Fiedler’s writing).

2000 and Beyond

The demand for greater accuracy in young adult literature portraying characters with disabilities intensifies in the next work examined. Writing in 2000, Rosenblum and Carroll stress the need for accurate portrayals of persons with disabilities in young adult fiction in their article “Characters with Visual Impairment in Young Adult Literature: Are They Effective Role Models for Our Teens?” When trying to identify modern works of young adult fiction featuring characters with visual impairments, Rosenblum and Carroll find the fiction landscape quite different than did earlier disability fiction bibliographers like Baskin and Harris or Quicke. Rosenblum and Carroll have difficulty finding fiction featuring characters with visual impairments with which young adults can relate. The authors analyze several works of young adult literature depicting individuals with visual impairments and devise a rating system to evaluate how well each work addresses the issue of the character’s disability.

Unable to locate any studies dealing with the portrayal of characters with visual impairments in young adult fiction, the authors turn their attention to scholarly materials that address the depiction of characters with physical and cognitive disabilities. Rosenblum and Carroll look at works such as John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) that are frequently taught in high school English classes. The authors recommend that teachers set aside classroom time to discuss the depiction of characters with disabilities in such novels and how political, historical, and social contexts affect the portrayal of these characters. Citing the work of Margolis and

Shapiro (Margolis, H. and Shapiro, A. "Countering Negative Images of Disability in Classical Literature." *English Journal*, 1987: 76, 18-22), Rosenblum and Carroll argue that without this extra instruction, students may form damaging attitudes toward persons with disabilities. Robertson had already championed such qualification of works in the classroom.

Rosenblum and Carroll maintain that in order for fiction featuring characters with disabilities to succeed with young adult audiences, the works must offer information and themes that are not "didactic, condescending, or pedantic." The authors then cite the criteria established by Heim as guidelines to use in selecting young adult fiction dealing with disabilities. Further, the authors stress that since literature provides many young adults with their only exposure to individuals with visual impairments, realism in this literature must be of the utmost importance.

Bowman and Gordon (2000) delve into personal, parental, and societal responses to adolescent disability in their examination of Cynthia Voigt's 1986 young adult novel *Izzy, Willy-Nilly*. The intervening 15 years between Quicke's piece and this publication show a shift from an emphasis on integration of persons with disabilities into "normal" society" to a focus on the personal adjustment of the individual within society. Bowman begins the piece, published in 2000, with a description of her own struggles with societal reactions to her disability, juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. She details the support she received from her family growing up as well as the differing responses she received from her friends and persons she met for the first time (including positive experiences

such as friends thinking of her rather than her disability when they forgot that she could not move as quickly as they did to negative interactions such as persons who spoke loudly and slowly to her even though her hearing and mental abilities are not impaired).

The authors use this personal account as a segue into a discussion of personal and family ordeals and emotions surrounding disability and how society should act in these situations. The authors explain that they have chosen Voigt's novel due to its exploration of the same challenges, experiences, and feelings they describe. They then summarize the novel and offer insights into how young adults may react to reading this novel. The authors then recommend that teachers learn about the grieving process and provide an outline of Livneh's (1986) overview of the stages in the grieving process. These stages are: initial impact, defense mobilization, initial realization, retaliation, and reintegration. Bowman and Gordon then suggest an exploration of this process can be used in tandem with an examination of the novel in the classroom.

In their analysis "*Freak the Mighty: Birth Defects and Disability in a Literary Friendship*" published in 2000, Carico and Stanley explore the young adult novel and discuss ways in which the novel can be used to help young persons with disabilities. Their focus on personal development is much like the work of their contemporaries Bowman and Gordon. Carico and Stanley begin with a description of Rodman Philbrick's 1993 novel *Freak the Mighty*, a novel detailing the friendship of two adolescents, Kevin (who has a physical disability) and Max (who has emotional and cognitive disabilities).

After summarizing the story, Carico and Stanley explore the book's use of language. Max, with Kevin's help, learns to use words or gain power over them, rather than being overpowered by them. Meanwhile, Kevin uses language to have power over others and to gain some measure of control in his own life. Carico and Stanley also detail language's importance in the novel through naming. Characters' names and Kevin's ability to assign names (and therefore meanings) to persons and objects are highlighted.

Carico and Stanley then analyze Max and Kevin's friendship. Carico and Stanley stress the importance of young persons with disabilities having friendships and engaging in other rituals vital to adolescents. The authors focus primarily on what Kevin gains from the friendship. In their opinion, Kevin may gain a greater feeling of self worth due to Max's acceptance, respect, and lack of focus on his (Kevin's) disability.

Carico and Stanley also discuss how teachers and counselors might use the book to help young persons deal with their disabilities. The authors identify five areas of the school environment that may bring either frustration or encouragement to young persons with disabilities, depending upon how those areas are structured. Those areas are: interaction among persons; functionality and attractiveness of school building; programming which offers opportunities for all students to be involved; school policies which take into account disabled children and young adults' needs; and processes which allow all students, as well as parents and the community, to provide input.

In their 2000 publication “The First Child Born into the World Was Deformed’: Disability Representation in These Times,” Mitchell and Snyder examine current views toward disability in literature as products of historical beliefs. Like Bowman and Gordon and Carico and Stanley, the work of Mitchell and Snyder reflects an emphasis on the individual with an impairment and how that individual is affected by society, rather than how best to help that person conform or fit into that society. The authors contrast previous “normalcy narratives” in which disability is viewed as something that must be fixed in the confines of the narrative with “modernist and postmodernist antinarratives” that try to upset these popular perceptions of disability. As an example, the authors point to Ernest Hemingway’s character Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*. Barnes refuses to allow his disability (impotence brought on by a battle injury) to be used as a metaphor for his time. The authors then demonstrate how disability (both physical and mental) has become a central theme in many of the most noted literary works of the twentieth century (e.g. Sylvia Plath’s *Bell Jar*, Robert Lowell’s *Life Studies*, Toni Morrison’s *Bluest Eye*). Mitchell and Snyder argue that persons in the United States acquire views on disability more from films and books than from policies or personal interactions (166).

Mitchell and Snyder advocate a “close reading” strategy in the study of literature about individuals with impairments. They call attention to such works as *The Sound and the Fury*, *Catcher in the Rye*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, and *Of Mice and Men* to reveal that, while many of these novels may portray characters with disabilities metaphorically, upon a

deeper inspection the reader finds that these novels carry stringent critiques of the manner in which individuals with disabilities are treated in the societies of their times.

Like Mitchell and Snyder, Keith compares past and present views on persons with disabilities to identify a pattern in literature. In the 2001 publication *Take up Thy Bed and Walk: Death, Disability and Cure in Classic Fiction for Girls* Keith examines methods in which illness and disability are used in “classic” fiction traditionally read by females. Keith points out that characters in such novels as *Heidi* and *What Katy Did* become disabled in order to tame their wild natures or as a punishment for some type of sin. These characters usually receive a miracle cure once they have learned to conform to societal mores for their sex. In addition, she argues that some characters in classic fiction are too good and are disabled or die so that other characters may receive atonement (e.g. Beth in Alcott’s *Little Women*). The author concludes that the “kill or cure” belief is prevalent in classic novels dealing with disability.

Keith also looks at contemporary child and young adult fiction featuring characters with disabilities to determine whether the patterns set in classic novels continue. Keith notes that realism became much more important in works of children’s fiction as the twentieth century progressed. Keith states that this movement is at odds with the traditional children’s fiction format that demands a happy, neat ending. Despite the move towards realism, however, the author notes that there are still glaring inconsistencies in many modern books dealing with disability. For instance, Keith points to one 1994 novel in which a character

who has very strong arms and is able to race her wheelchair over curbs must rely on others to push her from class to class. Keith also notes a movement away from having characters whose disabilities are the main issues they face in novels. Using very recent child and young adult novels as a basis, Keith sees a trend in which characters with disabilities are increasingly incorporated into stories as “real independent characters” rather than plot devices.

Works examined from the late 1970’s to early 1980’s show how literature dealing with disability and the reality it seeks to describe are quite separate, much the same as the separation between persons with disabilities and the “normal” world at that time (a separation often enforced by physical and legal barriers). Works from the mid-1980’s to mid-1990’s seek to bring fiction much closer to reality when dealing with individuals with disabilities because those individuals were entering into the same classrooms and workplaces as people without disabilities. Accordingly, the pieces published in 2000 and 2001 provide evidence of another dramatic shift in disability literature for young adults. These more recent works call on educators and readers to see literature dealing with individuals with disabilities as not only learning opportunities, but as occasions for enjoyable and informed reading by all readers. These works show that by being mindful of past societal views as well as current mores, the reader can gain a rich understanding from disability literature, no matter the time period in which it was written.

Examination of Works

John Neufeld's *Lisa, Bright and Dark* has continued as an influential young adult novel from the late sixties. The novel was selected as a *New York Times* Outstanding Book of the Year. It went on to sell over two million copies and became a television movie starring Kay Lenz, Anne Baxter, and John Forsythe. The book deals with mental illness frankly and without the terror or extreme drama present in many other works dealing with the issue. Though the main character eventually attempts to kill both herself and another young woman, the portrayal of the character is sympathetic and indicting of the adults around her who ignore her illness.

Although told from the perspective of a friend, the novel revolves around Lisa Shilling, a sixteen-year-old who seems to have everything. She is pretty, intelligent, affluent, popular, and has a gorgeous boyfriend. However, as her friends realize and the adults in her life pointedly deny, Lisa begins to exhibit signs of progressive mental illness. This mental illness virtually incapacitates Lisa and leaves her with violent swings between manic happiness and extreme depression. The entire action of the novel centers on Lisa's illness and others' reaction to it. Though classes, dinner parties, and discussions of Hollywood stars occur, all of these actions serve only to accentuate Lisa's illness and the toll it takes on everyone around her.

Although the narrator, Betsy Goodman, admits of Lisa's mental illness "We noticed something a few months ago. When *she* noticed it no one knew [...]," Lisa seems to transform from an ideal teenager to, as Betsy describes her,

“[...] out of her skull. Sick, psychologically. Insane [...]” (17) in a matter of months. By portraying Lisa before the onset of her illness as nearly flawless, the novel implies that this illness could happen to anyone. Further, this assertion that Lisa was once “normal,” seems to invite unaffected readers to identify with the character more.

As Lisa’s symptoms of mental illness advance, those close to her react in different ways. After a fit of self-mutilation, Lisa’s disinterested parents send her off to a rest home to convalesce. Her only “treatment” is sitting by the ocean for six weeks. When she returns, her illness remains unchecked and two of her friends, “All-American Girl” Mary Nell Fickett and “All-American Schlep” Betsy become increasingly worried about her. Lisa’s appearance-obsessed mother (her father is all but absent from the story) refuses to admit that Lisa is anything more than “on edge” and becomes angry with those who try to get help for her daughter. Although he knows that Lisa is seriously ill, the high school guidance counselor declines to take an active role in getting professional help for Lisa because he does not want to anger her parents. Most of Lisa’s teachers also refuse to take direct action in helping her for the same reason. Only Mary Nell’s minister father and Lisa’s English teacher, Mr. Milne, attempt to reason with Mr. Shilling, but they are quickly rebuffed.

As the adults in her life seem to have abandoned her, her friends (with the help of a third young woman, “Princess” Elizabeth Frazer) devise a group therapy scheme. They believe that giving Lisa persons with whom she may speak openly about her illness will help her. As if to ensure a realistic portrayal of

mental illness, the author goes so far as to have Lisa's friends pore over materials from *Encyclopedia Britannica* to the works of Freud and discuss symptoms they read about as they relate to their friend.

Despite her friends' best efforts, Lisa's illness continues to progress. After Betsy's father witnesses Lisa walking through a closed glass door, he tells Mrs. Shilling that her daughter needs professional help. Elizabeth and Mary Nell state Lisa's case more accurately, but Mrs. Shilling refuses to change her mind even as attendants load her daughter into an ambulance. She first tries to blame someone else for pushing Lisa through the door, then claims that Lisa's illness is just the girls' overactive imaginations. When Mr. Goodman asks her if it would "do any harm to let a professional see her? [...] just in case what the girls say is true" she fires back, "Are you mad? [...] There's nothing at all wrong with Lisa that a little discipline won't cure. She's simply a spoiled selfish girl who is showing off for some absurd reason. We have no intention of letting her ride roughshod over us" (102). Only Lisa's subsequent and irrefutable suicide attempt in the hospital convinces her to allow Lisa to have counseling.

When professional help does finally arrive for Lisa (in the form of Elizabeth's former therapist), the girls presume that Lisa will soon become better. The therapist warns the girls that Lisa will not be "as good as new" immediately, but does tell the girls that she may be able to come home for a visit in seven months. There is every indication in his talk with her friends that Lisa will return to school shortly thereafter. He even cautions them that they will have to help her then more than ever to readjust.

Throughout the novel, a strange paradox occurs. Nearly all adults, not just Mrs. Shilling, ignore the observations of Lisa's teenaged friends. Betsy observes at the end of the novel that even Dr. Donovan, Lisa's therapist, does not give as much weight to their words as to her father's passing observations. She states, "[...] Dr. Donovan came to our house to talk with Daddy who really couldn't tell him anything we hadn't already. Except, of course, Daddy's point of view being more mature it probably carried more weight than our own" (115). This dismissal of the teenagers as unreliable is in marked contrast to the amount of pressure the adults in the novel knowingly place on them. The school guidance counselor gives tacit support to the young women's group therapy plan, even though he knows that they are unqualified. The guidance counselor is willing to go along with the plan as long as he is not directly involved. The teachers at the school also have knowledge of the teens' plan and willingly entrust Lisa into their care. In telling the young women that he and the teachers have come to an agreement about Lisa, he says " [...] we decided that Lisa should be left alone, under your care" (80). Betsy comes to the realization that the guidance counselor and all the teachers are "afraid of Lisa's parents. Plain and simple afraid" (79).

Lisa, singularly, is portrayed as crying out for help in any way that she can. She does not stop when she realizes that her parents and teachers will not do anything to aid her. She accepts as much as possible her friends' attempts at amateur therapy. She is still begging for help at the end when she picks the moment that Mr. Goodman comes into the room to walk through the glass door.

She rallies enough to tell him “thank you” as they await the arrival of the ambulance because she now knows that she has committed a serious enough action to have an adult intercede on her behalf. While Lisa shows through her constant appeals for help that she is not passive, her actions are harmful to both herself and others and are therefore not portrayed positively.

The language used in the novel to describe Lisa’s illness and its treatment also bears examination. As noted earlier, Betsy says that Lisa is “out of her skull. Sick, psychologically. Insane [...]” (17). Mrs. Shilling complains that the teenagers keep telling her that Lisa “is going crazy” (101). Mr. Shilling asks Reverend Fickett if he is insinuating that Lisa is “losing her mind” (70). Even the therapist, Dr. Donovan, uses the term “nuthouse” when cautioning Betsy, Elizabeth, and Mary Nell that they must be protective of Lisa when she returns to school (123). These phrases are in keeping with the vernacular of the time; however, the images they communicate to the reader may not be innocuous.

Deenie, a novel by perennial young adult favorite Judy Blume, was first published in 1973. Deenie Fenner, a thirteen-year-old who learns that she has adolescent idiopathic scoliosis, narrates the story. The story spans from several months before Deenie receives her diagnosis and follows her through her adjustment to the brace she must wear for four years. Realism is important in this novel, as all aspects of Deenie’s examinations and brace fitting are described in detail. Although Deenie is portrayed as having normal teenage interests (dating, friends, personal appearance, and parties), these activities serve predominantly to contrast Deenie’s life before and after her diagnosis. The

focus of this novel, like the focus of *Lisa, Bright and Dark* is the main character's disability.

Like Lisa Shilling, Deenie is also beautiful, popular, and at one time considered "normal." Her mother is fixated on Deenie becoming a model and weekly takes her to modeling agencies. Although one agency consultant comments on the way Deenie walks, her mother shrugs this off as Deenie's slouching on purpose. Only after an examination by the school gym teacher who notices a curvature in her spine is Deenie taken to see an orthopedic specialist. Although Deenie hopes to have a single operation to remedy the issue, her doctor gives her a Milwaukee Brace, a brace that starts at her chin and ends at her tailbone. Deenie must then deal with not only her own feelings about the brace and the reactions of her classmates, but also her mother's hysterics about the situation.

Mrs. Fenner seems to see Deenie only as a beautiful face. When a stranger on a bus comments on Deenie's looks, Mrs. Fenner volunteers proudly, "Deenie's the beauty, Helen's the brain" (7). Helen is Deenie's older sister. While Mrs. Fenner pushes Helen to study and excuses her from household chores, she watches Deenie's diet carefully and cares little for Deenie's schooling as long as she makes passing marks. Although she does not deny Deenie's impairment as vehemently as Mrs. Shilling denies Lisa's, Mrs. Fenner does not offer Deenie much support. Mrs. Fenner is so obsessed with her dream of Deenie's becoming a model that she even argues with Deenie's doctor about her wearing the brace. "You don't understand, Dr. Kliner. Deenie's going to be a

model. She can't wear a brace for four years," (70) she tells the doctor. Luckily for Deenie, her father is more level headed. He tells the Dr. that he just wants Deenie "fixed" no matter what it takes. Mrs. Fenner also acts as if she is the victim of Deenie's spinal curvature. When Deenie receives her brace, Mrs. Fenner cries to the doctor, "What did we ever do to deserve this?" (88). She tries to find someone to blame for Deenie's illness (first her husband's cousin who had a slipped disc then Deenie herself). Her grief is only assuaged when she learns from the head of a modeling agency that seventeen will not be too late for Deenie to start modeling. At that point, Deenie finally tells her that she does not want to become a model.

Other adults also make Deenie's situation more difficult. Deenie's vice-principal urges her to begin riding the bus for disabled children to school. Although she only intends to help, the vice-principal's classification of Deenie as disabled deeply disturbs her. Deenie's sewing teacher also complicates matters for Deenie because she refuses to accept her doctor's appointment as a valid reason for not doing an assignment. The teacher then expects Deenie to sit at her machine the same as she always has, even though she cannot bend her head forward to see the stitches. Even Deenie's math teacher suggests that she might be more comfortable standing at a lectern during class (apparently the teacher does not remember how embarrassing just being thirteen can be); the teacher does come up with a useful idea when she suggests that Deenie push her chair back to help her bend over her work more easily.

Deenie's friends and classmates prove much more accepting than her mother or the school staff. Her best friends, Midge and Janet, give her continual support (they even purchase her an expensive nightie to wear in the hospital when they believe Deenie will have an operation). Also, they do not treat Deenie any differently after she comes to school in her brace. Midge and Janet then fully accept Barbara, a girl whom Deenie becomes friends with even though she had previously avoided her due to the girl's eczema. Although Deenie's classmates ask her incessant questions about her brace the first day she wears it to school, they soon adjust. Even though a young man Deenie likes asks her if she can take the brace off for a little while at a party, the young man continues to flirt with Deenie and their relationship progresses.

Deenie and her family eventually accept her scoliosis. Her father willingly makes sacrifices to cover Deenie's medical bills and her mother harps less on Deenie's spoiled modeling career. Her father's support and trust enables Deenie to keep her brace on during a friend's party, even though she had secretly planned to remove it. Deenie even contemplates a career as an orthopedist.

For most of the novel Deenie is a passive character. Although she sometimes lets her frustration show to her parents and her doctors, she rarely stands up to her domineering mother. Finally, her decision to keep her Milwaukee brace on at all times does not come from her own desire to heal, but from her fear of letting her father down.

The language Deenie uses in the novel to describe others with disabilities and herself is also interesting. At the beginning of the book, Deenie describes

“Old Lady Murray,” a woman with a hump on her back who sells newspapers, as “so ugly she makes me want to vomit” (6). She calls Barbara (the young woman with eczema) “Creeping Crud” behind her back. After Deenie begins to accept her condition, however, her view of persons different from herself changes. She has a conversation with Ms. Murray and becomes good friends with Barbara. In addition, when Deenie passes the “Special Class,” she no longer turns her head. She looks at a girl working at the blackboard and wonders “if she thinks of herself as a handicapped person or just a regular girl, like me” (139). Deenie, although many now view her as being “handicapped,” clearly still sees a distinction between “regular” and “handicapped.” However, she has gotten so far as to accept that persons with disabilities may be “regular” in their own self-concepts.

Alice Bach’s 1980 publication *Waiting for Johnny Miracle* is the only story in this selection to use a hospital as a primary setting. The story focuses on Becky and Theo Maitland, twin young women in their mid-teens. Though the mood of the novel is dark, its handling of children with cancer is not sentimentalized. Medical procedures are mentioned frequently and sometimes explained in detail. Death and living in the context of growing up are dealt with compassionately but realistically. Once more, the novel’s focus is the character’s disability. Descriptions of social and family life, when not directly related to the character’s disability, serve primarily as comparisons to life after Becky Maitland’s diagnosis.

Becky and Theo are beautiful, smart, and stars of their basketball team. The young women share a near telepathic bond; that is why no one is more

shocked than Theo to learn that Becky suffers from severe leg pains. Believing it to be caused by a strained muscle, Becky tries to cover the pain until she can barely move. Her parents take her to specialists and they learn that Becky has osteosarcoma. Becky is then separated from Theo and immersed in life in the children's hospital waiting for, and then recovering from surgery. Although homesick and bitter at first, Becky becomes close to many of the other patients, most much sicker than she.

Unlike Lisa Shilling and Deenie Fenner, Becky has always had a very good relationship with her family. Mrs. Maitland and later Theo stay with Becky in the hospital. They care for Becky when she is home (in several scenes Theo puts her arms around Becky and functions as her other leg when they climb stairs). Even though Mrs. Maitland explodes at her husband for being home while she is in the hospital with Becky, the family pulls together in support of Becky.

While her family remains supportive throughout her illness, Becky feels increasingly separated from them and more and more bound to the other young persons in the hospital. Theo senses this separation, too, and is distraught that she and her sister cannot be the same again. She wonders, "How many times did she have to tell Becky that she would go through it, fifty-fifty, the perfect loyal twin" (109). During a fight with her father in which he admonishes her for complaining when she knows of so much sickness around her, Theo tells him, "[...] knowing that many kids are worse off than I am doesn't turn me into an angel. I'm still me. I don't know what it's like to have cancer and Becky hates

me for not knowing” (197). At the hospital, Theo is continually reminded that she and her sister are now different. She is told that Becky will never be the same again, even when she comes home, and one of Becky’s new friends warns her, “It’s hard for you to think like us, Theo” (209). At the end of the novel, though, Theo confesses to Becky how lonely she has been since Becky’s diagnosis. “You have no idea how often I’ve prayed we could stay together on the same side of the door. Since you were diagnosed I’ve been so lonely,” Theo tells her sister. Becky replies, “But we can listen for each other, Theo. We can talk to each other through the door” (240).

Not everyone is as encouraging of Becky as is her immediate family. Her boyfriend, Jay, leaves her when she tells him about her diagnosis. Her grandmother meanwhile behaves much like Deenie’s mother by “trying to make the tragedy her own” (137). “It’s the grandparents who suffer most in these cases [...]” (136) Mr. Maitland’s mother tells Becky’s parents when she visits the family over Christmas. She also tries to convince the Maitlands to subject Becky to several quack cures. In addition, the family’s minister calls special attention to Becky’s plight before the whole congregation during a Christmas Eve service. Becky is embarrassed and her younger brother Mickey runs from the sanctuary.

Becky gradually accepts her cancer and the new way of life for her it has caused. Becky knows that Theo would be stunned if she told her, “The metal bone and plastic tendons are part of me, they are not the enemy. The tumor was not the enemy[...] . My fear of the tumor was the enemy” (225). Although Becky knows that many of her new friends will eventually die, she is given hope for a

recovery. The doctors tell her that, since her tumor was detected early on, she has a good chance that the cancer will not spread. In addition, she receives an implant in her leg to replace the bone destroyed by cancer and chemotherapy. This implant should allow her to walk normally again, she is told.

Becky is by far the most positively aggressive character portrayed thus far. She accepts painful treatments as a part of her healing and works very hard in physical therapy following her surgery. In addition, she takes very definite actions in trying to decrease the suffering of her fellow patients and family. Becky goes so far as to help mastermind a plot to have the young doctor whom her roommate, Mariela, is in love with sleep with Mariela so that the young woman will not die a virgin. Not even in accepting her illness is Becky depicted as passive. Rather, her acceptance is viewed as a coming to terms with a fact she perceives.

The manner in which characters in the novel speak about cancer is worthy of note. Many of the young patients in the hospital engage in “tumor humor.” Several of Becky’s friends in the hospital are addicted to a soap opera set in a hospital. They laugh and make jokes when a pristine actor portraying a doctor tells a beautiful young actress that she has leukemia to a backdrop of organ music. However, Theo notes, “[...] how careful the kids are with each other, how hard they try to spare each other pain. Unlike the piranhas at school” (205).

Barbara Corcoran’s 1982 book *Child of the Morning* deals with a different type of disability, epilepsy. As in the novels by Neufeld, Blume, and Bach, Corcoran includes information on the symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment of the

illness with which her main character deals. While Corcoran's novel does not give the specifics of diagnosis and treatment present in the other novels, most of *Child of the Morning's* action takes place before diagnosis. This novel, more so than the works previously examined, does allow the main character to concentrate on other issues aside from her disability (probably due to the late diagnosis). Although the main character's disability colors most scenes in the novel, she is allowed to work and often socialize without primary emphasis being placed on her impairment.

Susan is an older teen who lives in northeastern Maine. During a volleyball game at school the previous year she received a skull fracture. Since the injury, she has experienced frequent "spells" in which she loses consciousness for short periods of time. The local doctor, a kindly older man, assures her that the blackouts will pass in time. Although she is well liked in the town no one will give her a summer job for fear that she will pass out and injure herself at work. When a theatre troupe comes to town Susan manages to conceal her impairment and works as a stagehand. She excels at her job, begins taking dancing classes with the actors, and agrees to take part in one of their plays. It is only when she passes out onstage that the new town doctor evaluates her and diagnoses her "spells" as epileptic seizures.

During the main action of the novel Susan's father and her older brother are away on a long boat trip. Through brief flashbacks, the reader learns that Susan and her father have a very good relationship. Susan and her mother also get along very well. Susan's mother worries a great deal about Susan, but

accepts the first doctor's word and does not take her doctor out of town for a second opinion. Unlike Lisa and Deenie's mothers, Susan's mother does not look for anyone to blame for her daughter's illness. When Susan's sister accuses their mother of insinuating that Susan's injury is her fault (Susan's sister was at one time captain of the school volleyball team), her mother replies, "No, it's no one's fault. But it happened" (7).

Susan's relationship is not nearly so agreeable with her sister and brother-in-law, Mabel and Jerry. While Susan admires her older sister, she is leery of her ostentatious husband. Jerry disapproves of Susan's love for dance. Additionally, after Susan passes out in Mabel and Jerry's restaurant, Jerry through Mabel makes it known that he no longer wants her to come there because she embarrasses him.

Susan does find acceptance with the actors and backstage workers of a theatre troupe that comes to town for the summer. She is sometimes able to sense when a "spell" is coming on and is able to hide her illness from her new friends. She is quickly promoted from poster hanger to stagehand. The troupe members praise her hard work and give her kind, if not always accurate, advice. With them she is known not as the girl who passes out, but as a valuable member of the crew. When the troupe's dance instructor catches Susan moving along with the dance class, she pulls Susan aside and tells her to join the class just like one of the actors. Although her supervisor, Steve, notices one of her spells and makes her rest until she feels all right, he does not try to keep her from working. Instead, the he and the troupe owner decide she has been

working too hard and raise her salary. Even after she is diagnosed, Steve asks her to work for him again the following summer.

Although Susan is able to function well throughout most of the novel, once her largest seizure hits during her dance performance she is nearly incapacitated. The town's new doctor diagnoses her and sends her to epilepsy specialists who try different drugs to treat her. The drugs make her so sick that she thinks having seizures would be preferable. Most troubling to Susan, she fears that she will lose her sense of self and that "From now on, no doubt, everything she did and said and felt would be explained away as part of epilepsy" (105). Finally, the doctors find the right drugs for her and she is able to lead a "normal" life (6).

Like Becky Maitland, Susan is not portrayed as a passive character. Although she feels shame over her "spells," she does not let them control her life. When the townspersons deny her the ability to work because of her impairment, she searches until she finds employment elsewhere. Long before her diagnosis and treatment, Susan knows that she must stand on her own, "spells" or not. When reflecting on her mother's reluctance to plan for Susan's going away to college, Susan thinks, "She loved her family but she had to live her own life somewhere away."

Language used in reference to Susan's disability is also important in this novel. Mabel describes Susan during one of her seizures as acting "like she's retarded or something" (6). Susan feels sorry for her mother and thinks, "It must be embarrassing to have a daughter who went around falling down and acting

peculiar” (11-12). Susan wants the old doctor to find some type of medicine so that she won’t “go through life being treated like a freak” (16). After the new town doctor asks her how long she has had epilepsy, Susan tells her mother that persons with epilepsy are “batty. I mean they’re retarded” (99).

Izzy, Willy-Nilly, the Newbery Award winning 1986 publication by Cynthia Voigt, tells the story of yet another non-disabled teen who suddenly becomes disabled and must learn to deal with not only her new impairment, but society’s reaction to it as well. Voigt also incorporates a great deal of realism into her novel’s portrayal of a specific ambulatory impairment’s effects and treatment; she even makes a special dedication to a physician who answered her questions and helped her in the proper use of medical vocabulary. The main character’s disability and the manner in which she, her family, and her friends deal with it are the most prominent aspects of this work. The opening scene shows the story’s heroine in her hospital bed after her leg has been amputated and the action of the story explains both how she arrived there and the aftermath of that time. All action (except for the party scene leading to the drunken driving accident) in the novel centers on the character’s disability and how she and those close to her learn to live with it.

The novel tells the story of Isobel (Izzy) Lingard, an attractive, popular, and intelligent young woman who is the only freshman cheerleader on her high school’s squad. Izzy’s well-to-do parents have raised her to believe that good manners, concealing one’s weaknesses, and associating with the right crowd are all important values. After losing part of one leg in a car accident with a drunk

driver and being alienated by many of her former friends, Izzy learns that she must redefine herself.

Unlike several of the parents examined thus far, Izzy's mother and father are fiercely encouraging of Izzy after her accident. Although Mr. Lingard is usually portrayed as a supportive figure, he is more often than not away at work or playing tennis with business associates. Izzy's interaction with her mother takes center stage when considering her relationship with her parents. While Mrs. Lingard is quite different from Deenie and Susan's mothers in that she refuses to accept that Izzy's impairment will in any way limit her daughter's options in life, her adamancy that Izzy's life will not change at all initially harms Izzy. Izzy's mother defines her daughter's dealing with her new impairment as just a "period of adjustment" after which her life will go back to the way it was before the accident. Mrs. Lingard finds it hard to accept that several of Izzy's popular best friends now avoid her. Also, Mrs. Lingard urges Izzy to end her new friendship with unpopular Rosamunde because she does not look like them and is not in their social class.

Despite her inability to resign herself to all facets of Izzy's new life, Mrs. Lingard tries very hard to help Izzy, to the point of knowing when not to help her. Although Izzy's parents give her their downstairs bedroom when she comes home from the hospital, they make it clear to her that the arrangement is only temporary. Mrs. Lingard does not mince words when Izzy tells she postpones a trip to the hair salon because she does not want to go out in public. "Because

persons will stare,” Mrs. Lingard tells her. “But you’re going to have to get used to it,” she continues (169).

Mrs. Lingard also gradually learns to accept some aspects of Izzy’s new life. Although Izzy’s mother pushes her to spend time with her old friends instead of outspoken Rosamunde, when it becomes clear that Izzy’s old friends do not want to spend time with her, Mrs. Lingard comments on expecting more from them. Mrs. Lingard’s relationship with Rosamunde is tenuous at best; she often classifies Rosamunde as a “clinger” and tells Izzy, “[...] she’s not really your kind of friend, is she? She’s so different, in everything, her attitudes, her background, her values” (211). After Mrs. Lingard spends time talking with Rosamunde, she acknowledges that Rosamunde is much “deeper” in many ways than Izzy’s old friends and then develops a deep regard for Rosamunde. Mrs. Lingard asks Izzy, “She’s got more depth than any of your other friends, Rosamunde, doesn’t she? It’s not just intelligence either, is it?” (249)

Izzy’s friends and classmates’ reactions to her after the accident differ greatly. Two of Izzy’s three best friends, Lauren and Suzy, refuse to have much to do with her after her accident. Beautiful Lauren avoids her whenever possible; Izzy comes to realize that Lauren’s avoidance is part of her own fear of becoming less than beautiful. Suzy at first makes friendly overtures toward Izzy. Izzy soon learns that Suzy’s principle motivation is to influence her to not testify against Marco, the drunk driver who caused Izzy’s accident because she (Suzy) has started a romantic relationship with him. Later, Suzy only acts friendly toward Izzy because she fears she may become popular again. Lisa, Izzy’s other best

friend, is willing to continue their relationship; however, their contact is curtailed due to Lisa's continued involvement with Suzy and Lauren.

Rosamunde, a young woman Izzy had previously had little contact with because of their perceived difference, befriends Izzy when she is still recovering in the hospital. While Izzy's old friends shy away from her as she lies in the hospital bed and avoid getting near her leg, Rosamunde sits comfortably on Izzy's bed. Although Izzy at first resents Rosamunde's straightforwardness, she learns to appreciate Rosamunde's honesty and understands that true friends say what they mean to each other. Through Rosamunde, Izzy finds the understanding and depth she had missed in her previous friendships. Though Rosamunde is a constant source of support for Izzy, she makes a point of forcing Izzy toward physical independence. She does not offer to help Izzy make lunch until Izzy reminds her that she (Rosamunde) would offer to help if Izzy had two fully functioning legs. Rosamunde does not comfort Izzy when she falls in a crowded hallway at school; rather than helping Izzy up, she deflects the attention of passersby and allows Izzy to take control of the situation by giving Izzy an opening to make a clever remark.

Like all of the heroines presented so far, Izzy has the opportunity to return to near "normal" life. Since she does not lose her knee in the accident, her therapist assures her that her prosthesis will allow her to walk fairly "normally" with practice.

Though Izzy's belief in good manners at any cost may make her appear a weakened character, she is far from submissive. While she does not become

openly angry with her former friends for abandoning her, she does not do so out of fear. Rather, she understands first that Suzy is only concerned with social status, not the reality of a person. Then Izzy realizes that Lauren lives “as if she was enclosed in a glass cage, posing for the persons who might be watching” (237). She sees Lauren as an empty young woman who believes that her looks are all she has to offer. Izzy knows that showing her hurt and anger to these young women would make no difference, even to her.

Further, by taking the school newspaper appointment (although she knows she is offered it only because of guilt over the accident), Izzy is able to take an experience at which she feels at a disadvantage and turn it into an opportunity for empowerment. Izzy works very hard and receives a promotion, makes new, real friends, and learns to define herself in a different way.

Finally, Izzy shows that she is a powerful character by protecting another young woman. Though Izzy has not spoken with Marco since the accident (he did not even call her to apologize), she knows that she must do something when she sees him trying to seduce Georgie, a freshman whom Izzy admires. Her remark to the couple may seem to some readers as an act of bitterness; however, with all that Izzy has been through because of Marco and the kind feelings which she expresses for Georgie, telling Georgie, “[...] I only went out with him once, but it was quite an experience” (260) resembles a warning more than an act of hate.

The language used in the novel to define Izzy and her disability is significant. Izzy continually refers to herself after the accident as a “cripple.” She

feels that other persons are identifying her as a cripple as well. When Lauren avoids her at a party, Izzy reflects, “[...] Lauren thought I was a cripple. She was right, I was. Am. But that wasn’t all I was [...]” (251).

1991 saw the publication of noted author Gary Paulsen’s novel *The Monument*. Published at a time of war for the United States, the novel’s theme of remembrance for not only those who have died in war but those left alive heavily overshadows concerns about the disability affecting the story’s narrator. Instead, the novel focuses on the young narrator’s learning about the power of life and art.

The novel’s main character is thirteen-year-old Rocky (Rachael), a young girl who lived in an orphanage until the age of nine. In the beginning of the novel, Rocky believes the reason behind her late adoption was potential parents’ wariness of a bi-racial child with a left leg that “[...] didn’t grow right” (6). After several operations to correct a birth abnormality, doctors fused Rocky’s knee so that her leg would grow straight. While her left leg looks no different than her right, she is unable to bend it and she tires easily. Rocky recounts the many times she went in for visitations with prospective parents: “Every time somebody would come to look at little girls to adopt, I’d come walking into the conference room with those braces on my left leg and you could see the light go out of their eyes. I used to make small bets with myself as to how long it would take – ten, fifteen seconds. Never a minute on the big clock on the wall and the light was gone.” She tells the reader “Nobody wants a caramel kid with braces[...] . Sometimes they’ll love a kid if they already have one and they have to get braces, but not from the start” (7).

However troubling Rocky's earliest experiences are due to her disability, Rocky's physical impairment plays a relatively small role in the action of the novel, a time four years after she is finally adopted. Fred and Emma, two well-meaning and loving alcoholics, have taken Rocky to live with them in the small town of Bolton, Kansas. Though their constant drinking causes Rocky to avoid them, they love her and "have never, never done anything bad to [...]" (13) her. Rocky's best friend is Python, a large dog of indeterminate background who defends Rocky on the rare occasion she is teased. Rocky goes everywhere with Python, leaning on his large shoulder to help her walk. Rocky's life is fairly uneventful until the summer the town decides to build a monument to its war dead. Though Rocky's first view of Mick Strum is of his large bottom pressed against the window of his station wagon, Rocky soon learns that Mick will change her life. After determining that Mick is not a "pervert" and that he is the artist who has been contracted to design the monument for the town, Rocky forms a fast friendship with him. She is entranced by Mick's ability to "see inside" objects and people. Soon Rocky realizes that she, too, must become an artist. After separately telling both her parents and Mick of her desire to become an artist, they both respond that it couldn't be "[...] any other way" (81, 83). Mick goes one step further and tells Rocky that he knew she was an artist when he first met her. Mick helps Rocky learn about drawing and art and helps her to see different aspects of the world that surrounds her.

There is a strong impression that everything that happens or does not happen in the story is meant to be that way. All things work together toward an

end in this novel. When Rocky finds a beaten Mick shoved into a trashcan outside the local bar, he tells her that the bar fight had been as much a part of his plan to learn about the town as had been his interactions with farmers at Fred's grain elevator. As Fred and Emma continue to support her, Rocky even comes to believe that she remained at the orphanage for so long because she was meant to be with them. Rocky's disability seems to be just another factor in the novel which helps shape her as an artist.

Two incidents occur in the novel in which someone other than Rocky herself makes reference to her physical impairment. Rocky tells the reader that Kyle Offens, a boy near her own age, had begun teasing her because he thought her "[...] leg was funny" (26). When his teasing extends to a poke in the arm, Kyle quickly finds himself beneath a growling, bare-fanged Python. The teasing incident is never repeated. Mick is the only other person to draw attention to Rocky's impairment. At the meeting in which Mick presents to the townspeople his plans for the monument he posts numerous drawings of places and people he has observed in Bolton. Most of the people are incensed because the drawings show them as they truly are: drunk, tight-fisted, or lovelorn. However, Rocky sees the picture of a young girl with a stiff leg and finds that for the first time she is truly seeing herself. She describes the drawing and how it makes her feel in detail: "I was walking down the street with Python, holding on to his shoulder and the leg was there, the leg I didn't like to think about was there, and I could see it now, see it as others saw it, and I felt tears coming to my eyes. Not because I was sad or upset, but because I felt like I did when I saw the painting

by Degas with the ballet dancers in it and I wanted to know them and they were gone” (127). The novel makes no more references to Rocky’s impairment after she comes to this realization.

Like previously examined characters with visible impairments, Rocky tries to camouflage her leg; however, rather than resolving to learn to walk as limp-free as possible like Izzy, Rocky accepts her physical condition and does little to try to change it. While walking with Python eases the appearance of her limp, Rocky’s principle reasons for leaning on Python are to increase her own comfort in walking and for the companionship and protection that Python offers. Also, though Rocky at first argues against wearing a dress because of her fear of others seeing her leg, she feels very pretty once her adoptive mother convinces her to try one on. Further, Rocky does not define herself by her disability. Unlike the identity she accepts as an artist, Rocky views her disability first as another circumstance making her life more difficult and then as one of the factors shaping her into the artist she will become.

Rocky describes her disability in stark terms. She calls her left leg “stiff” and says that her walking style is “kind of funny” (7). Rocky identifies individuals Kyle Offens teases as “people who aren’t right” (26). Since Offens teases her until Python steps in, Rocky has lumped herself into this group. After meeting Mick, though, Rocky identifies herself more often as an “artist” than as someone with a “stiff” leg.

Freak the Mighty, Rodman Philbrick’s 1993 young adult novel describing the friendship of two very different but very similar young men, is a favorite

among readers of many ages. Gillian Anderson, Sharon Stone, and Meat Loaf starred in the 1998 movie version of the book, *The Mighty*. The book continues to remain on numerous recommended reading lists for young adults. Unlike the novels previously explored, the action of this novel and the lives of the disabled teens it describes do not revolve around disability. Rather, the characters have numerous adventures that are not directly related to their disabilities. Their disabilities function more as parts of them (much like a romance novel hero's height is a part of him) than as foils they must overcome. There is even a principle villain in this story, other than disability or society's prejudices toward it (as in the other novels), that the characters must battle.

Freak the Mighty is the story of thirteen-year-old Max and Kevin. Max is very large and suffers from an undiagnosed cognitive impairment as well as emotional issues caused by witnessing his father murder his mother. Max lives with his mother's parents, Grim and Gram, two individuals who love him very much even though they fear that he will turn out like his father because he resembles him so greatly. Max sees himself as stupid and does not like to think. He tries to avoid affection whenever it is offered to him; he knows "what a rotten lie that hug stuff was" (2).

Kevin has a disease that prevents his body from growing while his internal organs keep maturing and getting bigger. He is very intelligent. Kevin memorizes dictionaries, works with his computer, and learns about bionics and robotics for fun. He is also quite obsessed with King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. Kevin's father left when he was born (because of his son's

disability); however, his mother, the Fair Gwen of Air, loves him very much and pushes him to lead as active a life as possible.

Max and Kevin become friends when Kevin and Gwen move in next door. Max likes Kevin because he knows so many things and takes time to explain them to him. Also, Kevin is tough and takes no grief from anyone, not even the knife wielding hoodlum Tony D. To Kevin, Max is the powerful body he does not have. Also, Max is someone who not only accepts him, but admires him as well. When Max first lifts Kevin to his shoulders at a fireworks display, the two know that together they are much more than they are separately: they are Freak the Mighty, “slaying dragons and fools and walking high above the world” (1). Kevin, or Freak, acts as the brains of Freak the Mighty; he directs Max with words, hair tugs, or kicks of his feet. Max is of course the giant body of Freak the Mighty. Together, they voyage over land, rescue damsels in distress, and destroy villains (sort of).

The boys’ relationship is symbiotic. Max likes having the feeling of a “smart brain” on his shoulders and Kevin revels in the “fealty” (defined as “loyalty” in the official *Freak’s Dictionary*) that Max gives him. In parallel scenes, Kevin pounds on Max’s back when he chokes on a hotdog during his first dinner with Freak and later rescues Max when his father tries to choke him to death (Kevin squirts Killer Kane in the eyes with a solution he tells him is sulfuric acid—really a mixture of soap, vinegar, and cayenne pepper); Max runs for help when Kevin chokes on American chop suey. The two boys save each other from more than choking. They are the only ones who really understand each other. The boys

see each other for who they really are, not their parentage or disabilities. The adults in the community see Max only as the “spitting image” of Killer Kane and Kevin as just a “poor” cripple.

Max and Kevin do not have a happy ending. Though Kevin tells Max that doctors are building him a bionic body, no miracle cure exists for him. Kevin dies and Max sinks much lower than he was even before meeting Kevin. He only begins to come out of his depression when he begins to write the “unvanquished truth” about him and Kevin a year later. Max’s writing and his admission that he might read a few books do hint that he may move more toward a societal norm of intelligence; however, by writing only about his life as a part of Freak the Mighty shows that he is in some way still carrying on as Freak the Mighty.

Max and Kevin are not passive characters. Kevin does not back down from bullies, gang leaders, murderers, or doctors. Rather than sitting quietly as his society tells him a good disabled boy should, he enlists Max and they form the superhero Freak the Mighty. Freak the Mighty marches through classrooms, returns a distressed damsel’s purse, and escapes from a murderer and a collapsing building. While Kevin is the emotionally stronger of the two, Max finds self-esteem and his own type of intelligence from their friendship. Seeing Kevin in danger also enables him to take his friend and escape Killer Kane. As Freak the Mighty, the two force the world to accept them on their own unique terms. Rather than trying to imitate “normal” persons, Freak the Mighty emulates its own brand of fairytale hero.

The words this novel's characters use to identify disability are important. Kevin is called "freak" even in playschool. Rather than accepting this term's derogatory nature, Kevin incorporates it as part of his persona. Kevin is also frequently called a "cripple." Max also understands that others see him as part of the "freak show." Max frequently calls himself a "butthead." Adults and other teenagers call him a "retard." Even Kevin likens Max's brain to that of a dinosaur. Together, they are referred to as "Frankenstein and Igor" and "Andre the Giant and the dwarf" (29-30). Kevin and Max, as *Freak the Mighty*, take those slurs and turn them upside down, though. If they are freaks, then they are freaks on their own terms. |

Named one of ALA's Top Ten Best Books for Young Adults and a *Horn Book* Fanfare Book, Edward Bloor's 1997 novel *Tangerine* also focuses its action on something other than the main character's disability. Paul has had a visual impairment since the age of four when, his parents tell him, he stared too long at a solar eclipse and nearly destroyed his sight. However, few things are quite as they appear in *Tangerine*. Seventh grader Paul Fisher has much more to deal with in the novel than his visual impairment.

Paul, his mother, father, and older brother, Erik, move at the beginning of a school year to Lake Windsor Downs, an affluent development outside the small town of Tangerine, Florida. Despite his mother's insistence on labeling him as "legally blind" in front of his school principal and a first day at school in which he is given a guide to escort him around the school, Paul is able to function as a "normal" student for some time. He becomes the goalie of his middle school

soccer team. With the aid of corrective lenses and specially made sports goggles Paul is able to participate in the same activities as fully sighted students. Paul's activities are curtailed when his principal informs the soccer coach of Paul's status as visually impaired. The coach refuses to allow Paul to play because of insurance regulations. Though Paul is one of the best players on the team, his coach tells him, "I'm sorry, but there's no way we can justify putting a visually handicapped student in the goal, of all places, where he could get his head kicked in." The coach then looks at him as if he "was crazy to think otherwise" (61).

Paul's middle school soccer career is revived, though, when his middle school falls into a sinkhole. Paul enrolls in another middle school on the other side of town. This new school is the opposite of his old school; where Lake Windsor Middle's student body had been predominantly Caucasian and well off, Tangerine Middle's population is much more ethnically diverse and from more modest means. While Paul must work hard to gain acceptance at his new school, he finds success and friendship on the school's soccer team.

Meanwhile, Paul's father and brother focus on the "Erik Fisher Football Dream." Erik, a gifted kicker, quickly becomes one of the stars of the high school football team. His father works hard to ensure that Erik receives notice in the local media and attention from university sports scouts. While most people who come in contact with Erik believe him to be a fine young man, Paul knows that Erik is also a cruel young man who has no compunction about hurting others.

The novel returns to the device of using disability as a metaphor. Repeatedly, Paul makes reference to his ability to see that Erik is evil while others cannot. Like some soccer playing Tiresias, blind Paul is the only one who can see the truth. At the end of the novel, it is Paul's testimony about the murder Erik commits that convinces everyone else that Erik is not the perfect young man he seems. This use of visual impairment as a device harkens back to a previously discussed literary tradition which seems to reduce the validity of the character having the disability by making the impairment of greater importance than the character who possesses it.

Inevitably, Paul's world and Erik's collide. After Erik torments one of Paul's new friends, Tino Crus, the boy's older brother, Luis, has a run-in with Erik. Erik instructs his crony, Arthur Bauer, to strike Luis from behind with a blackjack. Luis dies from the injury. Though Paul witnesses the murder, he doesn't come forward about Erik's involvement until the police come to arrest Arthur. His decision to finally stand up to his brother had already been made, though. Paul helps his friends from Tangerine Middle attack Erik and Arthur during a school assembly. Afterwards, Paul has memories about the day his eyes were injured. Paul remembers that Erik held him down while his friend sprayed paint into his eyes. Paul confronts his parents and they admit that they made up the story in order to keep him from hating his brother. However, Paul, who has had to deal with being used as an example of a kid who did a very stupid thing and had to pay for his actions, does not accept his parent's excuse. He replies, "So you figured it would be better if I just hated myself" (257).

Though Paul's family is far from ideally supportive, his visual impairment is not the cause. His mother, although she draws attention to Paul's impairment when it fits her purposes, tries to treat Paul and Erik equally. She ensures that the form identifying Paul as a visually impaired student disappears from his transcripts before they reach his new middle school. Also, she attempts to comfort Paul after the truth about Luis Crus' death comes out.

Paul's father usually ignores him. He focuses his attention on his older son because he believes that Erik can have the career in professional football he had always wanted. Paul's father is unconcerned with his success at soccer; however, Mr. Fisher's ambivalence is caused by his disinterest in the sport rather than Paul's visual impairment.


The society in which Paul lives also seems fairly unconcerned by his disability. When others do draw attention to his impairment, the cause is usually self-interest rather than prejudice. While his classmates comment on his thick glasses, they put greater emphasis on other things such as his abilities as a soccer player, his being a star football player's brother, and the amount of money his father earns.

Paul is not a passive character content to follow society's mandates. Paul fights to play soccer over the objections of a society more concerned with categories of disability than personal ability. He bristles against his mother's attempts to use his disability to her own advantage and he rejects school administrators' attempts to treat him differently from other students. Finally, Paul stands up to his principle persecutor, Eric, by telling the truth to the police.

Language used in the novel supports the assertion that Paul's disability is not a big issue for those around him unless it can be used to benefit them. Paul's mother tells the principal of Lake Windsor Middle School that Paul "[...] has problems with his eyesight—he's legally blind" (24) when she needs an excuse to snoop around the new school; Mrs. Fisher is well aware that Paul has no problem finding his way around well lit places. Paul's teammates at Lake Windsor Middle call him "Mars" because of his special goggles. The name is used more as a nickname than a derogatory term once the other players get to know Paul. However, the nickname does not follow him to Tangerine Middle. There, he is called "Fisher Man" because of his surname. This difference in nicknames adds credence to Paul's feeling that he fits in better at a school composed of minorities because he has always viewed himself as a minority. His friends at Tangerine Middle prefer to ridicule him for being a rich kid than for having a visual impairment.

One other aspect of disability in the novel must be explored. While Paul's visual impairment is frequently referred to, an undiagnosed neurological disorder affecting Erik is only vaguely hinted at in the novel. Paul, the narrator of the story, sees his brother as lacking a conscience. Erik's illness is more of a dark, unmentionable force that looms over the story. Brief references made by Paul throughout the first part of the novel make the reader aware that something is wrong with Erik. Paul and Erik's parents, however, refuse to address the issue. When Paul and Erik's grandparents show up for an untimely visit after the murder of Luis Crus they remind the Fishers that they advised them to discipline Erik

after he first hurt Paul. Mr. Fisher still refuses to admit that Erik is ill. He tells them, “Erik did not need a doctor’s help. He did not need drugs. He did not need to be one of those medicated kids who float around all the time like they’re underwater” (278). While the Fishers are willing to spend a great deal of money of specially made sports goggles for Paul, they pretend that nothing is amiss with their oldest son until someone is killed.

 Wendy Orr’s 2000 publication *Peeling the Onion* won an Australian Children’s Book of the Year Award. The novel tells the story of Anna Duncan, a young woman in her late teens who becomes both physically and cognitively impaired as the result of a car accident. Before the accident, Anna’s life had centered on karate and her love for competing. After the accident, she must struggle to even walk and has trouble learning in the same way she once did. While the main action of the novel centers on Anna’s new disability, she must also deal with many other routine teenage issues which have very little to do with her impairment: the roller coaster love life of her best friend, a new boyfriend (and how to dump the old one), and dealing with the new boyfriend’s going off to school.

Anna’s parents provide her with support and as much understanding as possible after the accident. While her father worries about her ability to board a bus with a friend, he allows her to go out on her own without his supervision. Her mother hires a new employee so that she can stay at home more with Anna while she recovers. Even Anna’s younger brother and sister support Anna as much as they can and continue to treat her just as their big sister. After the initial shock of

seeing her bruised and swollen, her younger siblings are more interested in wheelchair races in Anna's temporary chair and the state of Anna's love life than with her new disabilities. Though each member of her family changes due to her disability (her formerly mild-mannered father now becomes easily agitated, her mother suffers from stomach trouble, and her little sister becomes a hypochondriac), Anna remarks that they still try "for the Happy Family Award" (91).

Anna's friends do not always prove as accepting as her parents and siblings. While Anna's friend Jenny remains supportive during her recovery and treats Anna no differently than she had before her disability, Anna's friend Caroline becomes distant and petty. She seems to resent the attention Anna receives and speaks callously to her. When recounting her rehearsal schedule for a school play, Caroline tells Anna, "[...] they don't slack off the work requirements or give you any special help if you've got in-school commitments, not like when you're having a sickie." This comment hurts Anna deeply and she thinks, "It slides in and out like a knife; slipped in so sweetly, in the same breath with the gossip, that it takes me a moment to feel the sting. The savagery" (65). Rather than continue to accept this treatment from Caroline, Anna ends the friendship.

Anna's relationship with her boyfriend also changes drastically because of her disability. Anna had begun dating Hayden, a fellow karate student, shortly before her accident. Hayden drove the car Anna rode in that evening and, although the police officers investigating the accident assure him that he could

not have avoided the collision, he feels responsible for Anna's injuries. Despite the continuation of their dating relationship, he fears touching Anna. When Anna realizes that their relationship is not working out, she admonishes him that he does not even kiss her. He replies, "How can I kiss you when I'm so scared of hurting you any more than I already have? All I can think about is what if we're pashing on and I push your neck a bit too far and break it again?" (140).

Anna ends her relationship with Hayden because she realizes that she has been using him more as a crutch than as a boyfriend. Although she immediately begins a relationship with another young man, he bears little resemblance to Hayden. Except for a very brief acquaintance years before, Luke, her new boyfriend, did not know Anna before the accident. He has only known her with her disability and fully embraces her (in more ways than one) as she is now. Luke encourages Anna to accept her disability and go on with her life. Also, rather than being depicted only as a giver in his relationship with Anna, Luke finds a new direction in his life because of Anna. Formerly unsure of what direction his career should take, Luke's relationship with Anna makes him realize that he should study massage therapy in order to help other persons with physical ailments.

Although many of Anna's actions are reactive in the novel, she is far from a passive character. Anna does not allow her relationship with Caroline to continue once she experiences the young woman's cruelty. Anna breaks up with Hayden even though she cares deeply for him and knows that telling him the relationship is over will not be easy. She also does not go running back to

Hayden when she has second thoughts about ending their “safe” relationship. Rather, she enters a new relationship with a more experienced older boy of whom her father does not wholly approve. Anna also has the strength to preserve her own well being. When Trevor, the young man who caused the accident, contacts her nearly a year later asking that she meet with him as part of his therapy to stop his nightmares, Anna refuses his request because she knows it will only cause her more anguish. Although Anna struggles with the decision, she realizes that martyring herself will only hurt her in the end. Finally, Anna shows her strength by refusing to feel guilty for some of the good things she has gotten from her disability. She rejects the notion that she “likes being injured” and that this feeling is keeping her from healing physically. She instead allows herself to be happy about her new relationship with Luke, a relationship she would not have had had her accident never occurred.

The language used in *Peeling the Onion* to describe Anna’s disability is significant. When Anna begins using her walking stick in public, she feels that persons stare “at the freak teenager with a stick.” She identifies her walking stick with something “old persons use” (70). Once Anna receives a letter from her insurance company declaring her “permanently impaired,” she muses on “which word is worse, permanent or impaired?” She calls “impaired” an “ugly word” which is “worse than handicapped. Disabled. Invalid.” Most strikingly, Anna asks the following: “Am I disabled? How could I be? I’m still the same person—just can’t do a few things—like walk much, or stand up for more than a minute, or sit for too long [...] .” She then asks, “When do you stop being normal and turn

into a handicapped person?" Anna goes so far as to consult a dictionary for a definition of the word "invalid." She resents the implication that she is "not valid" (114). Anna is clearly resents what it traditionally means for an individual to be "disabled."

Matt Christopher's sports novel *Wheel Wizards* tells the story of another young athlete who, like Anna, becomes disabled and can no longer compete as he had in the sport he loves. The novel, published in 2000, is a formulaic basketball novel, one of Christopher's popular series of sports novels for children and young adults. *Wheel Wizards* is worth examining because it shows that, even in sports, persons with disabilities and their activities are becoming more mainstream. The novel spends a great deal of time describing the sport of wheelchair basketball; the author gives great detail on everything from the design of sports chairs to the different degrees of disability points assessed during league wheelchair basketball games. However, *Wheel Wizards* concentrates more on depicting the action of games and the manner in which various moves are performed than on players' disabilities.

The novel tells the story of twelve-year-old Seth Pender, a promising young basketball player recently paralyzed from the waist down in an automobile accident. Seth feels a great deal of bitterness and frequently lashes out verbally at his family and friends. He resents most that he can no longer play basketball. After meeting Danny, a disabled athlete who plays wheelchair basketball, Set reluctantly goes to a wheelchair basketball game. Although he previously disparaged the game as not being "real basketball," after watching one game he

is drawn to the sport and joins a team. Seth's love of wheelchair basketball brings him out of his depression as he learns that he can lead a full life without the use of his legs. The rest of the novel details Seth's intensive training for the sport and provides fast paced play-by-plays of practices and games.

Seth receives a great deal of support from his family throughout the novel. His parents and sister remain caring even when he pushes them away and acts cruelly toward them at the beginning of the novel. Later, as Seth becomes more engrossed in wheelchair basketball, his family comes to see him play and his parents help him get a super lightweight sports chair. In addition, they make him see a therapist to help him deal mentally with his new disability.

Seth's friends also remain supportive after his accident. When Seth refuses to associate with his friends, his best friend, Lou, tells him, "[...] the guys still want to be your friends. Give us a chance, huh?" (5). Although Seth treats him harshly, Lou continues to try to maintain their friendship. After meeting Danny, Lou encourages Seth to go to the wheelchair basketball game. Lou goes to the game with him and is there to cheer Seth on when he plays later on. Lou is also very accepting of the new friends Seth makes on his team.

Although the depiction of Seth is somewhat two-dimensional (he is either angry, contrite, or happy), he is not portrayed passively. Far from meek, Seth openly shows his anger over what he perceives is the end of his life. Once he learns about wheelchair basketball, Seth pursues perfection in the sport single-mindedly. Seth does not give up, even though wheelchair basketball proves much more physically and mentally demanding than he had anticipated. In fact,

all of the wheelchairs riding characters in the novel are shown as self-sufficient and no more negative in temperament than their full-bodied counterparts.

The language used in reference to disability in this novel is quite different than in the other novels discussed. Possibly due to the lighter nature of the novel, no character uses slurs or slang when referring to persons with disabilities. While Seth early on bemoans his inability to ever play “real” basket again, even when talking with Danny about wheelchair basketball, his implication that wheelchair basketball is on a lower level than full-bodied basketball and his complaints that life is now effectively “over” due to his impairment are the closest characters’ language comes to disparaging disability. Conversely, when Danny informs Seth that he has used a wheelchair all his life, he tells him, “[...] I have a great life [...]” (113).

Frances O’Roark Dowell’s 2000 novel *Dovey Coe* garnered a 2001 Edgar Award for Best Children’s Book. The novel, a murder mystery set in 1928, revolves around twelve-year-old Dovey Coe and her family living in the mountains of Western North Carolina. Although Dovey has no disability, her older brother, Amos, has been deaf since having a sickness as a baby. Though not the novel’s main character, his actions are pivotal to the novel’s plot. The novel interweaves several social issues including the treatment of persons with disabilities, class conflicts, and the definition of gender roles.

Dovey lives with her father, mother, and her siblings, Caroline, her sixteen-year-old sister, and Amos, her thirteen-year-old brother and closest friend. Although poor, the Coes are a proud family who own their own small

piece of land while most of the other inhabitants of Indian Creek, North Carolina, must rent land from Homer Caraway, the richest man in town. Dovey is a fiercely independent young woman who speaks her mind and roams through the area with Amos.

Dovey attends the local school, but admits that she learns little there because city bred teachers leave quickly. Despite this educational upheaval, Dovey loves to read. Because of his deafness, Amos does not attend school. Dovey teaches him to read as well as write and lip-read. Though Dovey was only seven when she began teaching Amos, she explains that the task was not too difficult due to Amos' intelligence. She states, "Some folks thought that because Amos didn't hear and he didn't talk, he must be stupid, and a lot of folks treated him like he was, though it was a far sight from the truth. I taught Amos to read when he was eight and I was seven, which weren't as hard to do as you might think. I started him out with picture books that had just a few words. So there'd be a picture of a dog and the word 'dog,' and Amos made the connection right quick" (18). Dovey continues, ". . . I taught him how to read lips in pretty much the same way, and soon he could understand just about anything a person would care to say to him as long as they spoke directly to his face" (18-19). Dovey even admits that "He couldn't talk, but he could write. In fact, his handwriting was a sight prettier than mine" (19).

Aside from her teaching Amos to read, lip-read, and write, Dovey considers herself Amos' protector. She states, "I had made Amos my responsibility from the time we were little ones [...]." As their mother tries to

“make a lady out of” her, Dovey is not allowed to accompany Amos on all of his outings. When Dovey argues that she is now unable to “always keep him in my sights,” her mother tells her, “Amos can get along by his own self, Dovey [...]. Let him grow up some.” Dovey then points out to the reader that “[...] not once had Mama bloodied her knuckles on some fool of a boy who’d come up behind Amos and made crazy faces, whereas I bore many a scar” (17).

The problem of the novel does not revolve around Amos’ disability, however. Although characters frequently make reference to Amos’ deafness, this attribute is a small piece of the overall action of the novel. Dovey and Amos’ beautiful sister, Caroline, has attracted the attention of Parnell Caraway, the spoiled son of rich Homer Caraway. Parnell, used to having his way, decides that he will marry Caroline, even though she plans to attend teachers’ college in Boone. As Parnell courts Caroline, he tries to endear himself to the Coe family. Parnell does not fool Dovey, though. Her greatest fear is that, if Caroline marries Parnell, he may try to control her family with his money and send Amos away, an intention Parnell makes clear to Caroline and Dovey early on in the courtship. To this suggestion, Dovey replies in her blunt fashion, “Damnation and hell! [...] Why don’t you take your sorry self back to your daddy’s store?” (32).

While Parnell cares little for Amos, he likes Dovey even less because she has no problem in expressing just what she thinks of him. After Parnell makes the mistake of telling Caroline that she is little more than a pretty face, Caroline tells him in front of a crowded party that she will never marry him. Parnell decides to take his anger out on both Dovey and Amos. While their parents

make their way to Boone with Caroline, a drunken Parnell lures Dovey into his father's store by telling her that he has one of Amos' dogs tied up. Parnell kills the dog with a brick in front of Dovey. When she tries to stop him, Parnell turns on her and strikes her to the floor. When Dovey awakens, Parnell lies dead a few feet away from her.

The mystery surrounding Parnell's murder engulfs the rest of the novel. Dovey is put on trial for Parnell's murder and must accept an idealistic but inexperienced young lawyer as her defender. Though the reader and Dovey know that she did not kill Parnell, much of the town turns on the Coe family. Dovey seems sure of conviction until she and her lawyer come upon a near irrefutable fact: small Dovey can barely lift the murder weapon, a twenty-five pound soda canister. This evidence, combined with blood found on the canister that came from neither Parnell nor Dovey, convinces the judge of Dovey's innocence. When the body of a vagrant with a cut on his hand (a possible source of the blood found on the canister) is found in the river, the murder case is closed. Only Dovey knows for sure that the vagrant did not kill Parnell.

After reconsidering the events the night of the murder and Amos' actions leading up to the trial, Dovey surmises that Amos killed Parnell in order to protect her. She knows that Amos has written a letter of confession and discusses the matter with him after the trial to keep him from admitting his guilt to anyone else. Amos tells Dovey in a note that "I thought that he was going to kill you Dovey. It was the only thing I could do" (175). The novel ends happily for Amos and the rest of the Coes as Caroline brings home word from one of her professors that

Amos can one day become a teacher of deaf children if he learns sign language (something he is studying by the end of the novel).

Amos is not a submissive character in the novel. Though much of his society views him as unintelligent due to his inability to hear or speak, he perseveres and learns to read and write without the aid of a professional teacher. Further, Amos' act of protecting Dovey ends the life of a rich, well-connected individual. By taking this action against someone whom society views as superior to Amos physically, mentally, and class-wise, Amos is standing against the mores of his time (though his intention is to save his sister's life, not to make a statement). Finally, by becoming a teacher of students with auditory impairments, Amos will enable others to seek greater equality in their society.

The words other characters in the novel use to describe Amos and his disability bear examination. While the novel attempts to portray characters having common at the time prejudicial attitudes toward Amos' disability, the novel applies modern day sensibilities in its portrayal of the deaf character and the actions surrounding him. The author portrays Amos as an "ordinary" thirteen-year-old boy. Dovey tells the reader that Amos "loves good adventure as much as I do" (4). He climbs over the local knob with Dovey and his dogs, Tom and Huck, in search of arrowheads, herbs, roots, and adventures. Amos and Dovey also provide meaningful financial support to their family by selling herbs and roots to off-mountain doctors and greenery to city dwellers. People outside of the Coe family view Amos, if they choose to acknowledge him at all, as "crazy" and his disability as a punishment from God, however.

After Parnell does not acknowledge Amos' presence early on in the novel, Dovey states that Amos' deafness makes him "invisible" to people like Parnell (29). When Dovey recounts an incident occurring several years earlier in which Amos became frustrated when Parnell refused to allow anyone to play with his trains, she remembers that Parnell called Amos a "little monkey" in need of training and then asking whether Amos was "[...] too stupid to be made civilized?" (37). Dovey states that Parnell thinks Amos is "some sort of freak set loose from the circus." She goes on to say it seems that Parnell views deafness as "[...] contagious and you could catch it from just making eye contact" (50).

Others view Amos' deafness as a punishment for sin or a sign of mental instability. Parnell's mother testifies at Dovey's trial that Dovey's father is an evil man who does not attend church. She states, "I suspect that's why that boy of theirs come out deaf" (136). If he is not already aware of the way in which others talk about him, Dovey makes Amos aware when she admonishes Amos to tell no one that he killed Parnell because others would "say you was crazy and put you in a home for crazy people. You wouldn't ever come out again" (175).

Stuck in Neutral, a 2001 Michael L. Printz Honor Book Award winner, seamlessly blends cerebral palsy, teen angst, and a murder plot into one young adult novel. Although the main character's disability provides the catalyst for the story's principle action, this novel's focus is not on portraying a disability. Rather, Terry Trueman's novel seeks to portray a young man with "normal" teenage thoughts and feelings who happens to have cerebral palsy. Though the novel attributes extreme intelligence to a character the medical community maintains

has the mental aptitude of a four-month-old, the novel portrays the disability realistically. While detailing the character's total lack of physical control, Trueman (who has a son with cerebral palsy) poses an interesting question: Just because someone cannot communicate as others communicate, does that mean that person cannot be intelligent?

The novel tells the story of Shawn McDaniel, a fourteen-year-old boy who is able to remember everything he has heard and seen since the age of four. Shawn, the story's narrator, is matter-of-fact as he talks about coming of age with his mother, older brother and sister, and Pulitzer Prize winning father. Shawn has all of the thoughts and feelings of any fourteen-year-old; he becomes sexually aroused frequently, hates it when his mother speaks to him in baby talk, and loves his family even though he feels misunderstood by them. Aside from his incredible memory, though, Shawn has one great difference from most kids his age. Due to cerebral palsy, he lacks any control over his body and is yearly assessed as having an IQ of 1.2. In addition, he believes that his father is planning to kill him out of a misguided sense of "ending his pain."

Shawn's mother and siblings are shown as supportive, though not flawless. Even though Mrs. McDaniel has effectively lost her husband because of Shawn's disability and must devote much of her time to caring for Shawn, she is not bitter and is very loving toward Shawn. Cindy, Shawn's older sister, is patient with Shawn and gives him reading lessons when he is seven (though she does not believe that he can understand anything she teaches him). Cindy does admit on a television talk show that life with Shawn is hard, but she seems to

love him very much. Paul, Shawn's athletic older brother, is less patient. While he is less willing to deal with Shawn, Paul fiercely protects his brother and sneaks him junk food, something for which Shawn is intensely grateful.

Shawn's father is quite different. After watching his son have numerous grand mal seizures (which Shawn actually enjoys because they allow him to leave his body), Mr. McDaniel leaves his family because he cannot handle Shawn's illness. Though he provides financial support to the entire family, Shawn explains, "My dad didn't divorce my mom, or my sister, Cindy, or my brother, Paul—he divorced *me*" (4). His father's inability to deal with his son's condition prohibits him from seeing Shawn as anything more than his disability.

Further, Shawn's father uses his son to gain fame for himself and to further his own political ideals. Mr. McDaniel won his Pulitzer for a poem written about Shawn and has no qualms about parading Shawn in front of crowded banquet halls in order to give himself more credibility as a suffering artist. He then brings a television crew to film Shawn's "profoundly developmentally disabled" class during a documentary on taxpayer dollars being wasted educating those who cannot learn. Mr. McDaniel even uses Shawn to build media attention in preparation for his new book about a man who killed his disabled son.

His father's fascination with euthanasia and his many comments on "ending Shawn's pain" lead Shawn to believe that his father wants to kill him. Despite his fear of his father's intentions and the blatant exploitation to which his father subjects him, Shawn loves his father. Shawn believes that if his father

went through with his plans to end his life “[...] he’d be doing this out of love for me.” However, Shawn knows “[...] that whatever the wonderfulness of his motives, I’ll be dead” (12). This murder plot, which forms the crux of the novel, elevates the novel from being a story simply about an extraordinary character with a disability. The character now faces a much greater hurdle than his impairment; he must struggle as he can against a death not caused by his disability.

Although Shawn can do nothing physically to protect himself from his father or anyone else, his disability does not make him a necessarily passive character. Above all, Shawn wants to continue living. In order to do this, he takes the only avenue provided him in communicating with his father. During one of his seizures, Shawn visits his father in a dream and attempts to tell him that he is happy and wants to live. His father refuses to listen to Shawn and instead refers to him as already dead. To give credence to this interaction, Shawn’s father later recounts the dream to Shawn as he prepares to smother the boy with a pillow.

The words Shawn and other characters use in reference to his disability are important. Before recounting the yearly Individual Educational Plans tests he must take, Shawn identifies himself as a “total retard” (4). He later explains, “Retard means ‘slow,’ but it’s also a word used for a whole class of human beings who are only slow because normal persons try to make everybody do things in the same ways and at the same pace. We retards are retards only because normal persons call us that” (42). When two young strangers harass

Shawn and burn him with a cigarette lighter, they call him “Roller Derby,” “Ricky Retardo,” and “some kind of cartoon geek” (89-90). Paul nearly kills the strangers and, significantly, he refers to Shawn not as helpless or disabled, but as “my brother.” Shawn’s dad prefers to use more politically correct terms when referring to the son he intends to kill. He identifies Shawn as “uneducable,” “helpless,” and “hopeless.”

Stephen Roos, in his 2001 novel *The Gypsies Never Came*, draws from his own experiences growing up with a physical handicap. Roos is a Charlie May Simon Medallion winner and the author of more than twenty novels for children and young adults. *The Gypsies Never Came* tells the story of Augie Knapp, a young man born with cartilage stumps in the place of fingers on one hand. However, Augie’s problems and interests do not revolve around his impairment. With the help of an eccentric young woman who barges into Augie’s life, he learns that his hand is not something to be hidden, but to be appreciated because it makes him different from everyone else. In this novel, the character’s disability is portrayed as a mark of distinction rather than a hurdle or an imperfection.

Augie is a quiet boy just entering the sixth grade. His part-time job at a dry cleaners allows him to pursue his hobby: collecting other people’s secrets. Augie collects forgotten cards, letters, and legal notices and hides them in a suitcase in his family’s barn. His father left he and his mother when Augie was born, and Augie tries to deal with this abandonment and his mother’s new boyfriend. Augie also has to dodge Ginger Izbicki, a classmate who vows that

Augie will pay for not voting for her in class Safety Patrol elections, and her brothers. Augie's physical impairment colors most aspects of his life, from his belief that his father left because of his hand to Ginger's assertion that Augie goes unpunished in their money for votes scam because of his "gimpy hand." He hides his hand in a flesh colored stuffed glove and refuses to allow anyone to see it without the glove. Augie's life is further complicated when he meets Lydie Rose Meisenheimer, a young woman who insists that the Gypsies are coming for Augie because of his "cool" hand.

Augie's mother, Honey, encourages her son. She stuffs a new glove for him each time his old one becomes ripped or soiled. Other than the gloves, though, she makes little reference to Augie's impairment and never tries to curtail his activities. Honey harms her son only by refusing to discuss his father with him. She will not answer his questions as to why his father left them and will not even comment on a picture of Augie's father. Augie's absent father, however, proves very supportive of his son in the end. During a scene that mixes a dream and reality, a Gypsy really does come for Augie. The Gypsy rides up on a horse as Augie burns his suitcase full of secrets. He helps Augie to burn his glove, too, and kisses Augie's hand. Augie recognizes the man as his father and no longer hides his hand.

Although he tries his best to rid himself of her, Lydie Rose proves to be Augie's most useful friend. The magical young woman drives into town in a broken down convertible, begins telling Augie about the Gypsies when she first meets him at the dry cleaner's, and enrolls herself in Augie's sixth grade class

(no one ever persuades her to admit her age). Lydie Rose fights off the Izbicki brothers and writes an A+ composition entitled “Mutant Pioneers” for Augie when he is unable to write a paper on his family. Lydie Rose also tells Augie that his hand is something to be proud of because it makes him different from everyone else. Once Augie meets the Gypsies and learns to accept his hand, Lydie Rose leaves town as quickly as she came.

Augie’s family and friends are all portrayed as being in some way different or disabled, though usually not visibly. Augie’s Uncle Emil compulsively digs in the backyard, telling Augie that he will dig until he can see the stars on the other side of the world. Augie’s friend Raymond “Blue” Tebaldo dyes his hair blue despite his classmates’ continual harassment. Mr. Krulis, his mother’s boyfriend, is also depicted as being different due to his grief over the death of his son. Ginger, Augie’s sometime enemy, comes from a very poor, difficult family and her classmates routinely degrade her. Even the small secrets Augie makes himself privy to expose how out of the ordinary the townspersons truly are. Many of these “disabilities” overshadow Augie’s impairment, whether their bearers admit it or not.

Augie is not easily classified as either a passive or an aggressive disabled character. First, although Augie has a disability, the reader may easily forget that Augie is disabled because many of the issues he faces have little to do with his disability. Except to Augie himself, his disability is not really depicted as isolating. Also, while Augie is aggressive in dealing with others (he stands up to

Lydie Rose and then to the boys who ridicule Ginger), he refuses to accept himself and passively accepts wearing a glove to make him look “normal.”

Language used by characters referring to Augie’s impairment is notable, especially when comparing the different views of disability offered in the novel. Ginger says that Augie has a “gimpy hand” (36) and her brothers call him a “gimp” before they attack him (62). Lydie Rose, in contrast, views Augie’s disability positively. She implies that Augie is a “mutant,” something which she believes is an advanced life form. She tells him that his hand “[...] is something to celebrate” (106). She continually asks to see or hold Augie’s hand. When Augie sees her before she leaves town, he allows Lydie Rose to look at his hand. She tells him “It’s really so cool.” He can now agree with her and promises to take care of it “Like it was one of the family” (115). Augie shows through his words at the novel’s end that he has now accepted his hand as it is as just another part of him.

Terry Spencer Hesser’s 1998 novel *Kissing Doorknobs* deals with a disorder defined relatively recently in medical literature. Though chronologically earlier than the previous five novels discussed, *Kissing Doorknobs*’ portrayal of disability more closely resembles its representation in much earlier novels. Tara Sullivan, the story’s young protagonist, has obsessive-compulsive disorder or OCD. Unlike the disorders affecting characters from novels previously examined, OCD is a disorder that is only now achieving increased levels of understanding in the medical community (Eddy and Walbroehl).

Tara provides a first person narration of her struggles with worries and obsessions from pre-kindergarten up to high school. Numerous precise descriptions of Tara's illness and treatments make the novel read somewhat like an instructional pamphlet on OCD. A four-page afterword on OCD written by the director of the Pediatric OCD and Tic Disorders Clinic at the University of Illinois at Chicago and several pages of resources for people with OCD together enhance the textbook feeling of the book.

Though Tara's obsession with performing repetitive actions in order to avoid future dangers started when she was a very young child, OCD begins to fully control her life in the fifth grade. Similar to Denn's narrow escape from the bus in *Stone Cold*, Tara's strongest obsession begins with a trigger. At the novel's opening Tara explains to the reader: "*Step on a crack, break your mother's back!* The first time I heard that stupid rhyme was when I was eleven years old and still in possession of my own thoughts" (1). The refrain soon invades all of her thoughts. She finds herself unable to walk to and from school with her friends because she must constantly avoid and count all cracks in the sidewalk.

Tara's family and friends try to be supportive of her. However, their methods of dealing with her disorder range from ignoring her behavior to attempting to physically force her to stop her repetitions. When Tara begins to have "impure thoughts" she soon acquires more obsessions to ward off evil: studying her catechism and praying. Tara's constant, audible prayers along with her new obsessions with her parent's thoughts and their safety anger her mother

and worry her father. Tara's younger sister, Greta, is forced into the role of Tara's protector and beats up anyone (no matter their age or gender) who makes fun of Tara. Though both Tara's parents try to remain supportive, the effects of Tara's illness affect them. Her mother's reactions to her behavior increase in intensity from concern to violence; in an effort to make Tara stop touching her fingers to a doorknob and then to her lips, she slaps Tara each time she repeats the ritual. Tara's father has a heart attack and the stress from Tara's illness is partially blamed.

Though Tara's friends also find it difficult to deal with Tara's disorder, they remain loyal to her. Their support of Tara continues until she turns away from them (as in the case of Anna and Keesha) or until their own problems become too much for them (as with Kristin and Donna). At first her closest friends, Anna, Keesha, and Kristin, try to ignore her actions. After their initial anger over Tara's refusal to walk to school with them they decide to accept her behavior as another part of her personality. Their friendship continues through Tara's abnormal actions and Kristin's growing obsession with her own weight. The three girls turn on Tara only when she ignores them in favor of a new friend, Donna, a young woman with emotional issues.

In an effort to find a cure for her behaviors, Tara's parents take her to several health care professionals who provide various misdiagnoses. A high school science instructor is the first to suggest that she may have OCD. Tara then meets Sam, a teen who has seemingly overcome his OCD, and he refers her to his therapist, Dr. Leonardi, who specializes in OCD. Through behavior

therapy with Dr. Leonardi, Tara is able to overcome her obsessions. However, the novel's close leaves the reader with the understanding that OCD may once again take control of Tara's life. *Kissing Doorknobs* ends with Tara attempting to comfort Sam, with whom she has now shared a hug and a kiss, when his OCD comes back full force.

Tara is not by definition a passive character. When Dr. Leonardi presents her with a path of action to overcome her disability, Tara works hard despite the pain and terror she at first suffers. In addition, she is able to give support to Sam when his OCD takes control. However, Tara's relationship with her impairment bears a remarkable comparison to that of the title character of *Lisa, Bright and Dark*. Society makes it clear to Tara that she will never be able to "fit in" unless she accepts treatment and begins to act in an unremarkable manner. Though Tara realizes that she must battle the "tyrants in her head," she learns from society and her therapist that those tyrants should not be there.

Word choice used in the novel demonstrates conceptions of Tara's impairment. Tara's abnormal behaviors garner her nicknames like "space cadet" and "Count Taracula" or just plain "Count." Those these titles are more often used by people who care for Tara than by her enemies, the names in both instances serve to define Tara by her disability. Tara's father refers to each of Tara's new obsessions as "stages" (39) while her more demonstrative mother calls her "nuts" (41), a term by which Tara begins to view herself. Tara's sister at first blames her older sister's condition on her "nerves" (43). Greta seems to be the only member of the family, though, who tells Tara that she is "not crazy"

(96). Doctors Tara and her parents see before meeting Dr. Leonardi misdiagnose her condition as “Insecurities and self-esteem problems” (45), “Attention Deficit Disorder. Immaturity” (63), and “Borderline anorexia [...] anger issues” (108). Tara later learns that many health care professionals are unfamiliar with OCD, hence the confusion over her illness. Dr. Leonardi tells Tara that she is a “slave” to her obsessions (127). Tara defines her condition best, though, when she likens it to having “tyrants living in my head” (122).

Jack Gantos chronicles the misadventures of pre-teen Joey Pigza in his books *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* (1998) and its sequel, *Joey Pigza Loses Control* (2000). Joey has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Like OCD and pathological gambling, ADHD is a disorder that has relatively recently begun to be accepted in all quarters of society (Armstrong). The novels humorously follow Joey from life with his grandmother (who appears to have ADHD also) and his difficulties with school to life with his mother and more difficulties at school to a summer he spends with his father, a man whose ADHD is much worse than his son’s. While Joey is finally able to control many of the disorder’s symptoms with improved medication, his family life and the world surrounding him seem bent on disrupting his fragile control.

Joey’s family seems as mixed up as his frequently changing emotions. Joey explains early on that, contrary to popular belief, his grandmother is not a “batty old bird”; she just needs “Big-time Grandma-sized meds” ” (*Key*, 15). Grandma Pigza has frequent mood swings and goes from one project to another, never completing its predecessor. Joey describes his life while living with his

grandmother in this way: “We zipped around the house and slapped at each other like one of those World Wrestling tag teams. I’d be the Hulk and she’d be Doctor Doom and when the phone rang we’d run at it screaming and yelling and slam into each other, and by the time one of us got the upper hand the person on the other end had freaked out and hung up” (*Key*, 10). When Joey’s mother returns and establishes rules in the house, Grandma Pigza disappears. The reader finds out in the second book that Grandma Pigza has gone to live with Joey’s father. Though she seems even less inclined toward Grandmotherly tendencies in *Joey Pigza Loses Control*, Grandma Pigza allows Joey’s mother to take him away from his father because she knows it is best for Joey at the book’s end.

After several years’ absence (most spent chasing Joey’s father), Joey’s mother returns to assume primary care taking responsibilities from her ex-husband’s mother at the beginning of the first novel. Joey’s mother tries desperately to set things right with Joey. She keeps him on his medicine although the pills seem to only exacerbate Joey’s roller coaster moods. However, she leans heavily on her own “medicine,” a large bottle of Amaretto, to deal with the stresses of being a mother. Mrs. Pigza also works many hours as a hair stylist in order to support Joey. This necessary lack of attention causes problems when she is unable to attend a doctor’s visit with Joey in which his condition and his medication are reexamined. In addition, her work schedule and her inability to afford childcare influence her to send Joey to spend the summer with his father (a bad idea). In the end, though, Mrs. Pigza comes through for

her son. The reader is left with the knowledge that, although not a perfect mother, Mrs. Pigza loves Joey very much and will work as hard as she can to ensure his well being.

Joey's father is absent during the first book. Joey has few recollections of him since he ran off when Joey was in kindergarten. When Joey meets him in the second novel, Joey hopes that his father has truly changed himself. Mr. Pigza now has a job and a house; however, he has taken himself off of his medication and drinks heavily. Joey's father decides that Joey must learn to defeat ADHD on his own and flushes his medicine patches down a toilet. Predictably, Joey's ADHD goes out of control and he must secretly contact his mother to come rescue him. Joey's father is unable to provide him with support or much understanding because, as the novel shows us, he is unwilling to seek treatment for his own issues. As in *Stone Cold*, the reader finds a depressing example of what the main character will become without treatment. Like the King and Cookie, Mr. Pigza functions as a mirror of Joey's future if he does not have treatment for his disorder.

Like Joey's family, his society also seems divided on how best to treat him. At the beginning of the earlier novel, Joey's teachers are well meaning but unable to deal with his frequent outbursts. Because of the energy burst he often receives after lunch, Joey's actions earn him few of the gold stars his teacher distributes for good behavior. After a gruesome but funny episode in which Joey accidentally snips off the end of a classmate's nose, Joey is sent to a "special"

school for young people with various impairments; there, he is able to receive specialized attention to help him deal with his disorder.

With the intervention of “Special Ed” Vanness, a counselor at special school, Joey is re-examined and eventually receives “meds” which help him to better control his behavior. Special Ed works with Joey to help him learn how to deal with his disorder. Also, Ms. Maxi, Joey’s teacher at his regular middle school, proves supportive of Joey both during his time at the special school and after his return to his old middle school.

However, several people, including the injured girl’s father, refuse to give Joey a second chance. Joey’s mother is well aware of the way in which many people view her and Joey. After Joey meets with Special Ed, Mrs. Pigza asks Joey what she told the counselor about their home life. She tells him “Did you tell them I love you and I go to work every day at the beauty parlor and listen to everyone talk about their perfect kids and how sick that makes me because for one, I don’t believe their kids are perfect because no one is, and two, they pretend their kids are perfect so they can look down at kids like you and parents like me” (Key, 105).

Joey is portrayed more as a helpless character than a passive one in the first book. Without proper medication, Joey flits from one out of control situation to another. Old sayings take on new meaning as, after too much shoe-fly pie, he swings from the rafters in one episode while his running with scissors in another instance leads to a young girl’s disfigurement. Though Joey makes resolutions to change his behavior, Joey is shown as powerless to amend his actions. While

Joey gains some measure of control in the second novel, that control has come after he learns what life is like with proper medication. Joey makes the decision, without the aid of medication, to finally tell his mother that life with his father has gone very wrong; however, Joey knows that, without medication, his actions are out of his control.

The language used in both novels indicates the differing perceptions of ADHD. Joey describes his ADHD-inspired actions as “accidents” rather than admitting that he cannot control his behavior. The reaction of Joey’s peers to his behavior is evident in his nickname “Zippy” as well as other names people call him that he does not like (*Key*, 27). When Joey describes the other young people he meets in his middle school’s new special education room as “the hurt kids, the slow kids [...] the spastic kids who talked funny” he separates himself from them and feels that he does not belong with them because their disabilities are visible (*Key*, 36). Joey’s reaction to young people with visible disabilities shows that he does not initially consider himself as having a disability. The father of the young woman whose nose Joey injures calls him “messed-up” (*Key*, 84).

In *Joey Pigza Loses Control*, the reader receives a reverse view of Joey’s illness. In the first half of the book medication enables Joey to control his actions. However, Joey’s father labels his medication a “crutch” and calls Joey a “[...] drug-dependent guinea pig for doctors” (*Control*, 93). Mr. Pigza sees Joey’s impairment (which he shares) as something that a strong person can overcome without treatment. Though Joey pleads that his medicine is “a help,”

his father twists the meaning of his son's medication into something akin to illegal narcotics.

Pete Hautman's *Stone Cold* also signals a marked change in the presentation of disability in contemporary young adult novels. Hautman's work, voted by the American Library Association as a Best Book for Young Adults, deals with an impairment researchers still have difficulty classifying. The novel's young protagonist is a pathological gambler. Pathological gambling is a disorder that the medical community has only begun to devote substantive research to relatively recently (Namrata and Tian 1011). Though similar to obsessive-compulsive disorder, an illness that affects characters in two other books in this survey, pathological gambling is classified as an "impulse control disorder" (Bienvenu et. al.). In a departure from the theme of self-acceptance prevalent in contemporary novels dealing with disability, *Stone Cold* focuses on the destruction caused when the protagonist refuses to accept treatment.

The novel opens in June, two months before Dennis "Denn" Doyle's sixteenth birthday. Denn lives with his mother, Sally, and runs a small landscaping business. After he is nearly run over by a bus, Denn decides that his luck must be fairly strong and takes a group of older boys up on an invitation to a poker game. Denn is fascinated by the game and checks out several books from his local library on the subject. Denn's study and his single-minded approach to the game enable him to become very good. He learns to interpret "tells," clues that other players give about the cards they hold, and trains himself to focus solely on the card game being played. Soon, Denn becomes so

obsessed with the game that he has no time left to run his business, hang out with his friends, or see his girlfriend.

Though his girlfriend, Kelly, and his friend Father Seamus caution Denn about his fixation on the game, Denn sees no problem because he is making a great deal of money. Unlike the older boys he first plays with, Denn has no need to steal money from his mother or winnings from other players in order to cover debts. However, Denn finds himself unable to stay away from the game. After Jason, one of the boys he had played poker with originally, beats Denn up and steals his night's winnings from him, Denn describes himself as "depressed." Although he tries to tell himself that losing nine hundred dollars is the cause of his depression, Denn admits "[...] what really had me down was that I wouldn't be able to play any more poker with Jason and his friends. The thought of going back to earning a few bucks an hour mowing lawns and trimming people's lilac bushes—my stomach turned at the thought" (57). Denn's only interest now is poker. He soon becomes involved in high stakes games with adults and loses almost all interest in life outside of the casino he cons his way into. He even allows Kelly to drift away from him with little fuss because he realizes that she is taking time away from his poker playing.

The action of the novel moves quickly. By August Denn has become a regular at The Magic Hand casino. Denn's mother poses very few questions about his late nights and accepts his story that he merely cleans the casino. Veteran players recognize his talent and avoid him at the tables. There are

plenty of inexperienced players to go around, so Denn and older players like the seemingly ancient Cookie form tentative friendships.

Denn's family proves ineffectual at dealing with his illness. When Denn's screenwriter father, Frank (making his only in-person appearance of the novel after flying in from Hollywood), pulls him from the casino after a particularly successful run, Denn learns that he has lost all sense of time and has spent over twenty-four hours at the table. When Sally Doyle learns about her son's gambling, she is crushed and puts his finally present father in charge of the situation. Denn's father seems more interested in his son's ability to win fifty thousand dollars in three month's time than in influencing him to stop gambling. Frank Doyle's attention is focused on his career and his impending second marriage than on his son. He quickly extricates himself from the situation, explaining that "Steven" wants all the writers on the set of the movie he is currently involved in. Frank then shifts the onus of Denn's rehabilitation to Father Seamus.

Though Denn has known Father Seamus for several years, he has no idea that the priest also has a history of addictive behavior. Seamus explains that, like Denn, he was "the best" at his former profession as a wine critic, but took his work too far. After accepting his alcoholism and giving up drinking, Seamus then devoted himself to becoming the best priest possible. His extreme devotion soon turned parishioners away and he shifted his addictions to reading and long-distance marathons. Denn realizes that Seamus has only switched addictions, not overcome them. To placate Father Seamus Denn agrees to

attend Gamblers Anonymous meetings, but stops after his first meeting because he cannot identify with the “losers” he meets there. Like Denn’s girlfriend, Father Seamus avoids Denn once his addiction takes hold.

Denn tries to stay away from gambling on his own, but is thrust into a high stakes game in order to rescue his former friend Murky, another teenager who has become addicted to gambling but who is not nearly as good at it as Denn. In this game Denn finds himself facing the legendary “King” Kingston, a seemingly flawless player whom everyone acknowledges as one of the finest poker players alive. Though Denn tries to focus on forcing Murky from the game before he (Murky) loses too much money, he realizes that he must keep his attention on the game in order to win. The game ends in a showdown between Denn and the King. Denn identifies the King’s one “tell” and is able to win. Denn’s winnings include the deed to the King’s exclusive restaurant; the King is destroyed and is relegated to floating about the town trying to find another “stake.” *Stone Cold* finishes with Denn eating a steak in his office at the restaurant and waiting for his handler (formerly the King’s handler) to set up a game for him.

By the end of the novel Denn is portrayed as a character unable to control his illness. Denn’s closing words describe his need to play poker. He tells the reader: “I own a restaurant and three cars and I am the best poker player in the state—maybe in the world. I am rich, but I don’t care about the money anymore. I don’t even care about being the best. All I want is to play cards, to run my fingers over those slick, hard surfaces, to feel that cold power flowing in and out through my hands and eyes” (163). Denn is clearly not headed toward what

society would deem a recovery; he is fully consumed by the game. Through different characters in the novel Hautman provides three possible scenarios for Denn's life. Like Father Seamus, Denn might end up drifting from one addiction to the next, though those addictions might be on an "approved by God and most parents' list" (131) as Denn terms obsessions that society finds acceptable. Or, Denn may find himself floundering like the King when a more skilled player comes along. Harshest of all, Denn could meet the same fate as Cookie, a long-time professional he meets at The Magic Hand. Cookie seems to live at the Casino and appears to be very old. Only six people, all from The Magic Hand, attend Cookie's funeral. Denn admits, "I was surprised to learn that Cookie was only fifty-six years old" (162).

Situations more often than language seek to define Denn's impairment in *Stone Cold*. For instance, Denn's visit to the "wheelchair camp" his ex-girlfriend works for contrasts Denn's neurological disorder with the campers' visible physical impairments. While trying to find Kelly, Denn watches with interest as young people with various physical disabilities play softball. He notes ways in which the players compensate for their physical impairments to swing and make saves. When he watches the catcher pull himself into his wheelchair "with considerable difficulty," Denn wonders "why no one came forward to help him" (135). This image of young people helping themselves by wearing braces, helmets or riding in wheelchairs in order to carry on a "normal" activity like a softball game stands in contrast to Denn, a young man whose disability is not readily visible and who refuses rehabilitation to lead a "normal" life. Kelly's

commitment to working with young people having physical disabilities while she allows her relationship with Denn to end due to his neurological disorder further shows the distinction between disorders Denn's society is accustomed to and his own impairment.

Further, in Denn's own eyes as well as in the view of many people in his society, he does not have a "problem" because he has no debts and he makes a great deal of money. His success at gambling enables Denn to have and do many of the things that define success in his society. When Denn's mother and his new stepfather try to force him to give up gambling, Denn uses his wealth to hire a lawyer and have himself emancipated. Denn's gambling money influences shop owners, wait staff, and most other adults who feel that they can benefit from him, to treat him with respect.

Janet Tashjian's 1999 novel, *Multiple Choice*, bears a strong resemblance to Spencer Hesser's *Kissing Doorknobs*; both books focus on young women with OCD. Like Tara, fourteen-year-old Monica Devon feels that there must be something wrong with her brain. And, like Tara, Monica's disorder affects her family, friends, and herself.

While Monica's classmates and family do not endlessly worry that everything they do is done to perfection, Monica must spend most of her waking hours thinking about everything from the correct socks to wear to the right words to say. When she takes the letters A, B, C, and D from a Scrabble game and creates the game *Multiple Choice*, Monica feels that she can finally make "perfect" choices. By randomly selecting a tile from a bag, Monica knows that

she will either choose to do something “normal,” “plain dumb,” “mean,” or “charitable” depending upon the letter she selects. She tells the reader, “Since I’ve taken the choice out of making a decision, whatever the letters dictate *is* the right choice, the only choice. The perfect choice. It’s so calming to know I can’t be wrong anymore” (53).

Until her game of Multiple Choice causes the injury of the young boy Monica cares for, Monica’s family is unable to recognize that her problem goes beyond perfectionism. Monica’s mother and father love her, but their own issues distract them. Her mother has two younger children to deal with, plus an in-home childcare business to run. Though her mother is sometimes alarmed by her behavior (as when Monica weighs and then splits open two bean bag chairs in order to make sure they contain equal amounts of filling), she appears much happier to have a daughter who does not cause trouble and makes good grades. After Monica’s disorder becomes apparent, her mother reads articles on her daughter’s disorder. Mrs. Devon tries to open a discussion with Monica about the articles; however, when Monica mentions that she has learned in therapy that females should maintain power over their own lives, Mrs. Devon scoffs at the notion. Monica tells the reader, “Too much touchy-feely stuff always loses my mother” (157). Monica’s mother is not without hope, though. Monica realizes that she doesn’t “[...] give her [Mrs. Devon] enough credit” (158) when her mother next tells her that “[...] it’s more important to spend your life pleasing yourself than pleasing others” (158).

Monica's father is fully occupied by his demanding sales job and his frustrated theater aspirations. His attempt at communicating with Monica about her issues ends in his buying her goldfish and giving her an overblown lecture. Monica's father is able to give her guidance she can use – albeit unintentionally. After one of his theater performances, Monica asks him how he performed in front of so many people without making mistakes. He tells her that he made several during the performance but that no one really noticed. Monica asks, "How is it possible that Dad got to me more as a fictional character than he ever has as a father?" (165). Monica's realization does not make her bitter toward her father, though; by this point in the novel she has been in counseling long enough to realize that everyone makes mistakes. She tells herself, "I guess he's just muddling through like the rest of us" (165). Monica's final acceptance of both her mother's and her father's failings and successes as parents brings her closer to them and helps her to realize that making mistakes is part of human behavior.

Monica's grandfather seems best able to communicate with her. Like Monica, he is a word game aficionado. During his visits he plays word games with her, helps her do crafts and subtly talks with her about her life. By forcing Monica to work without a pattern on an independent handcraft project, he gives helps her realize that she is a creative person who does not need to constantly follow patterns or rules.

When Monica's family realizes she needs help they cannot provide, they decide she must have counseling and give her two options: see the school guidance counselor, or meet with Darcy, a counselor from a different school who

is also the mother of Justin, the young boy Monica unintentionally hurt. Monica decides on Darcy and is able to form a closer friendship with her. The two young women connect on their shared tendency toward obsessions; Darcy tells Monica that she was obsessed with food in her teens, an obsession that nearly killed her. Through weekly meetings with Darcy, Monica is able to gain control over her obsessions.

Like her family, Monica's friends and classmates do not recognize her disorder. Before inventing Multiple Choice, Monica does not consider herself popular. Monica has a best friend, Lynn, and other acquaintances; however, she doesn't socialize with the "in crowd" and a popular girl in her class seems to despise her (the young woman may just be jealous of Monica since Monica took the title of "smartest kid in class" from her. After developing Multiple Choice, Monica's outlandish behavior (wearing pajamas to school, using the words "cookie dough" in multiple sentences, etc.) attracts the attention of the popular kids who label her as cool. However, Monica's newfound acceptance becomes hollow when her Multiple Choice letter selection obliges her to write something mean about Lynn on the girls' bathroom wall. That action ends their friendship. Even after Monica begins counseling and explains that she was forced to hurt her friend because of a game, Lynn will not accept her reason. Lynn cannot understand why Monica would even make hurting her an option.

Like Denn in *Stone Cold*, the society Monica lives within rewards Monica's disorder early on. Parents, teachers, and classmates admire or envy her because of her academic performance. When she relinquishes part of her

decision-making ability to Multiple Choice, the often funny and rebellious actions she undertakes bring her favorable attention from the popular people at school. When Monica's actions (caused by her disorder) veer from entertaining to dangerous, though, she must go into counseling like *Kissing Doorknobs*' Tara.

Monica is portrayed as nearly powerless in dealing with her disorder alone. Monica's attempts fail at overcoming her obsessive behavior on her own. After scoring nine out of ten points in a popular magazine quiz titled "Are You Obsessing," Monica tries to follow the magazine's hints to stop obsessing. She quickly realizes that those hints are of little help to her and creates Multiple Choice to circumvent obsessing over her actions.

Monica turns her decision making ability, and by extension her disorder, over to the game of chance. Though she devises Multiple Choice and comes up with the scenarios to correspond with the letter tiles, Monica relinquishes her final decisions to the game. While playing Multiple Choice at first removes much of the stress she feels about making decisions, she soon feels even more stress when the decisions the Multiple Choice tiles dictate cause pain. When Monica tries to explain the game of Multiple Choice to an unreceptive Lynn, she tells her repeatedly that she "didn't have a choice" in playing the game (149-150). Monica is only able to begin to deal constructively with her obsessive disorder after she begins counseling with Darcy.

The novel makes it clear that Monica is incapable of dealing constructively with her disorder on her own; however, Monica takes some measure of control at

the novel's close when she decides to channel her obsession with word games into a future career in cryptography.

The language of the novel provides a useful perspective on the perception of Monica's disability. For instance, Monica tells her family that their careful treatment of her makes her seem like "some kind of baby" (30). After Justin's injury, Monica admits to her family that she has been playing Multiple Choice and that she cannot function without worrying. Her little brother, Billy, sings about Monica's "breakdown" while skipping through the kitchen as the discussion opens (124).

After her parents repeat a litany of how much she has going for her, how many friends she has, and the awards she has won (words which describe the side of Monica's illness that society praises), Monica tells them that she is "miserable." She describes her mind as "a broken record" (126). When Monica's mother tells that she was an easygoing baby, Monica calls herself a "basket case" (128). After trying to explain to Lynn why Multiple Choice forced her to write the cruel message, Lynn calls Monica an "alphabet zombie" (150). This epithet echoes Mrs. Devon's earlier comment that Monica has "[...] been some kind of Scrabble robot" (125). Through Monica's own derogatory descriptions of her illness as well as the words of her family and friends, the reader is shown that Monica's disorder is something painful that must be overcome.

Summary of Findings

The portrayal of characters with disabilities in young adult fiction has altered greatly over the past three decades. This evolution is apparent in the changing depiction of family, friends, and society's reactions to individuals with disabilities and the shifting language used in reference to disability in the novels. This change is also evident in the depictions of characters' relationships with traditional society; however, this change appears limited to impairments to which society has grown accustomed and which have received attention and understanding in the medical community for a comparatively lengthy period of time.

Family members of people with impairments are shown in recent literature dealing with familiar impairments to be more accepting of their loved one's disability than in previous young adult fiction. While the mothers in the two earliest works explored (*Lisa, Bright and Dark* and *Deenie*) refuse to accept their children's impairments, most of the parents in subsequent works examined are supportive of their disabled children. Arguably, the father depicted in the 2000 novel *Stuck in Neutral* causes more harm to his son than the mothers in the 1969 novel *Lisa, Bright and Dark* and the 1973 book *Deenie*; however, this father is the exception to the depiction of contemporary parents of disabled children rather than the rule.

While the reactions of disabled characters' friends is uniformly mixed throughout the decades, characters in more recent novels are now more apt to decide that old friends who no longer wish to associate with them were never

true friends at all. Social reactions to characters with impairments are also varying throughout the decades. Some newer characters like Shawn are faced with violence from strangers while older characters like Deenie are given tacit acceptance by society.

Language used in reference to characters' disabilities is quite harsh in many of the novels studied. Not only do non-disabled characters use insulting language when referring to individuals with disabilities; characters with impairments also use derogatory language when referring to themselves as impaired individuals. Newer novels, however, are more apt to include realizations by the characters that deprecating language is a symptom of a societal ill separate from them. For instance, Shawn realizes that "We retards are retards only because normal persons call us that" (42).

Older books in the selection (from the late 1960's through the early 1980's) appear uncomfortable in depicting a main character that was not recently "normal." *Lisa, Bright and Dark, Deenie, Waiting for Johnny Miracle, Child of the Morning, and Izzy Willy-Nilly* all feature characters who were perceived as non-disabled less than a year before the action of the novel takes place. Authors may have worried that their young readers would have trouble feeling empathy for a character that was not at one time physically like them.

This trend has changed gradually. Although more recent books like *Peeling the Onion* still focus on characters who have only recently become disabled, new books like *Freak the Mighty, Wheel Wizards* (which features both recently disabled and life long disabled characters), *Stuck in Neutral*, and *The*

Gypsies Never Came offer stories about characters who have been disabled since birth. A review of the scholarly literature (Baskin and Harris, 1977 and 1984; Robertson, 1992) seems to support that increases in disability awareness and the mainstreaming of individuals with disabilities has led to a greater acceptance of persons with disabilities in society. The sense of the other is gradually embraced until the other is now the same.

The portrayal of disabled characters and how they fit into society also changes over time in the works examined. This shift appears to conform to the following pattern. Disabled characters in older works (late 1960's to 1970's) wish only to conform to societal norms. They are willing to play by society's rules if that means that their disabilities will be healed. Characters with disabilities in works published from the early 1980's to the early 1990's believe that they no longer fit within traditional society because of their disability or what their disability has taught them. To varying degrees, they wish to follow their own rules, and, while they still seek to fit within traditional society, they relish the "different" identity that their disabilities have given them. Fiction from the mid 1990's to the present accentuates the similarities rather than the differences between disabled and non-disabled characters. However, rather than remaking characters with disabilities into versions of "normal" persons, disabled characters and their activities are portrayed as becoming part of society as they are.

Works from the late 1960's and 1970's like *Lisa, Bright and Dark* and *Deenie* show their main characters going through treatment so that they can once again become "normal" members of society. Lisa and Deenie see their

disabilities as dangerous invaders, which will destroy them if left unchecked. Their impairments, once cured by medical science will only be memories. Lisa and Deenie will be able to live in society by its rules with virtually no notice as ever having been disabled.

Further, Lisa and Deenie never truly separate themselves from non-disabled society. Lisa still clings to her old friends, even as she goes further into mental illness. Deenie maintains her old friendships and only goes outside of her previous associations when she befriends Barbara.

While works from the 1980's and early 1990's like *Waiting for Johnny Miracle*, *Child of the Morning*, *Izzy Willy-Nilly*, and *Freak the Mighty* all feature characters that receive treatments or gain insights, which will allow them to function as more traditional members of society, their impairments will always be with them. In *Waiting for Johnny Miracle*, Becky's leg will always contain the metal rod. She will also know that the cancer could return. In *Child of the Morning*, Susan knows that she will always be an epileptic and have to take medication in order to control her seizures. Izzy, like Becky, knows that her leg will never be as it once was. Although she knows that she will one day walk with a prosthetic leg, Izzy accepts that she will always be different from her friends. Max in *Freak the Mighty* may now be able to read and write much better than he had, but he will always have to deal with the pain from his mother's murder and the knowledge that he has lost his closest friend.

In addition, the characters in these four novels also accept their impairments as permanent parts of themselves that separate them from "normal"

persons. Becky knows that she is no longer the person she was before her diagnosis; she realizes that she now has more in common with the sick children in the hospital than with her family or her old friends. Susan, though she maintains her old relationships, feels an affinity for other epileptics. Izzy loses most of her old friends, but in the process builds strong relationships with persons (Rosamunde and an African American nurse) she had previously avoided because they were different from her. Max views his increasing literacy as “No big deal” (160) and only comes out of his depression when he thinks of his life as part of *Freak the Mighty*.

Works from the mid 1990's to the present such as *Peeling the Onion*, *Wheel Wizards*, *Stuck in Neutral*, and *The Gypsies Never Came* depict characters with impairments which (from the view of current medical technology) will not heal and for which no prosthesis exists to allow them to pass as “normal.” Anna (*Peeling the Onion*) will have cognitive and physical impairments for the rest of her life. Seth (*Wheel Wizards*) will never walk again. In *Stuck in Neutral*, Shawn's cerebral palsy will never go away while Augie (*The Gypsies Never Came*) will not grow new fingers.

These characters want not so much to thwart society but to find their own unique places within it. Anna is content with her new life and only wants to live it without being tied to her past. Seth has learned to appreciate the life he lives now and contemplates becoming a therapist so that he can help others who have disabilities. Shawn wants simply to live. Augie wants the world to accept his

disability just he has. Most importantly, these characters just want to be accepted as individuals rather than stereotyped as people with disabilities.

This shift in the depiction of disabled characters from subservience to activism to mainstreaming is also evident in the types of action portrayed in the novels. While the principle action of *Lisa, Bright and Dark*, *Deenie*, *Waiting for Johnny Miracle*, and even *Izzy Willy-Nilly* deals solely with the character's disability (usually focusing on the characters' illness, diagnosis, and treatment), novels such as *Child of the Morning*, *Freak the Mighty*, *Peeling the Onion*, *Wheel Wizards*, *Stuck in Neutral*, and *The Gypsies Never Came* allow their characters to have adventures not confined to their impairments. Susan in *Child of the Morning* makes friends and has a job mostly independent of her impairment while Kevin and Max as *Freak the Mighty* battle a murderer and have other adventures that have nothing to do with their disabilities. *Peeling the Onion's* Anna finds new romance, Seth in *Wheel Wizards* again experiences real competition, Shawn from *Stuck in Neutral* fights for his life against something other than his illness, and Augie in *The Gypsies Never Came* struggles with growing up without a father. Although most of these actions are somewhat interwoven with the characters' disabilities, the disabilities do not define the actions. In many of these newer novels, the characters lead full, active lives along with, instead of in spite of, their impairments.

This recent pattern of familial, societal, and personal acceptance of individuals with disabilities reverses when new novels dealing with characters having unfamiliar disabilities are studied. Though *Kissing Doorknobs*, *Stone*

Cold, the *Joey Pigza* novels, and *Multiple Choice* were all published within the past five years, the novels' protagonists are treated in much the same manner as characters with disabilities portrayed in novels from the late 1960's to the 1970's.

Treatment (whether chemical or behavioral) leading toward "rehabilitation" is shown as the only healthy, viable option for characters affected by obsessive-compulsive disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and pathological gambling. *Kissing Doorknobs'* Tara, her family, and her friendships are shown as spiraling downward until she receives a diagnosis of her OCD and enters therapy. By exposing the reader to non-flattering views of the King, a man whose fortune, power, and self-identity can be utterly destroyed in one poker game, and Cookie, a dying man whose gambling addiction has aged him far beyond his years, the author of *Stone Cold* provides chilling mirrors of Denn's future if he remains without treatment. Hautman clearly tells readers that Denn's future depends on his ability to overcome his impairment. Joey Pigza's decision to accept treatment while his father refuses it shows Joey as a hero while portraying his father at best as weak, at worst as dangerous. *Multiple Choice's* Monica is powerless to avoid hurting those she cares about until she begins counseling.

The desired outcome of treatment for each of these characters is "normal," societally acceptable behavior. Rather than accepting their disabilities like Anna, Seth, Shawn, and Augie, these characters are encouraged to mask their symptoms and conform to societal ideals. Though Tara, Joey, and Monica are not forced off to live in a special hospital like Lisa Shilling, they must submit to

therapy to be deemed “well.” Denn dooms himself by preferring to remain as he is.

Like novels from the beginning of this survey, the plots of these novels revolve around their protagonists’ impairments. *Kissing Doorknobs* reads a good deal like a case study, often placing description of symptoms over the scant amount of action not directly tied to Tara’s OCD. The action of *Stone Cold* is focused completely on Denn’s pathological gambling. The novel serves as a chronicle of Denn’s transformation from a “good kid” with a loving mother and friends to a poker addict. Every action in the books serves to draw attention to Denn’s impairment and the problems it creates in Denn’s life and the lives of those around him. Most of the action in the *Joey Pigza* novels centers on Joey’s often humorous actions resulting from his lack of proper medication. Though not as text book sounding as *Kissing Doorknobs*, *Multiple Choice* provides the reader with many more events tied to Monica’s OCD than unrelated actions.

As in the novels from the 1960’s and 1970’s the families and friends of characters with impairments are shown as being mostly intolerant of their loved one’s disability. Joey’s grandmother berates her grandson while Monica’s best friend blames her for her OCD-inspired actions. Unlike parents and friends from earlier novels, however, individuals in these new novels seem worn thin rather than prejudiced. Tara’s mother abuses her only after she has had to deal with her daughter’s compulsive actions for an extended period of time. Denn’s mother turns from him once Denn takes legal action to have himself emancipated.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Scholarly Works

In examining these works spanning more than three decades, certain patterns become apparent. Some of these patterns confirm the assertions of the scholars reviewed. My findings on the prevalence of portrayals of different types of disability agree with the conclusions of Baskin and Harris (in both the 1977 and 1984 publications), Quicke, and Robertson. The researchers note that orthopedic impairments are the most popular disabilities portrayed in traditional works, while cognitive and emotional disorders gain in popularity as awareness of these impairments increases. In my study, ambulatory disabilities are indeed the most frequently portrayed. Cognitive, emotional, and neurological impairments also appear in the works surveyed, though with less frequency.

As in Baskin and Harris' results and Keith's findings, my study also confirms that authors try to provide realistic portrayals of disability. Robertson's assertion on the prevalence of fiction about characters that have recently become disabled is also borne out in my study. Further, my findings in relation to fictional depictions of familiar disabilities support Keith's conclusion that recent works of young adult fiction allow characters with disabilities to have lives and adventures not directly tied to their impairments. My conclusions differ with Keith's findings when one considers novels dealing with disorders newly defined in both medical literature and society.

Discussion and Conclusions

Persons with disabilities comprise a very diverse, significant segment of society. In examining works of fiction dealing with disability as well as relevant scholarly works, it becomes apparent that accurate portrayals of individuals with disabilities in young adult literature are important because they help end the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes.

Although young adult literature of the past thirty years depicting disability is far from perfect, its study is imperative because the literature provides a perspective on how individuals with disabilities were viewed during those times. This knowledge enables a greater understanding of current perceptions of disability and how those disabilities are currently portrayed in young adult fiction.

Further, it is hoped that continued exploration of literature dealing with disability will lead to a greater understanding of the similarities and differences present in everyone. It is hoped that those differences can one day be accepted and celebrated rather than feared.

Recommendations for Continued Research

In order to provide a more complete examination of the evolving view of disability in young adult fiction, it is recommended that the following proposals be considered in future research:

- Review relevant literature contemporary to the time periods studied from the fields of medicine, education, and law. Ideologies from these areas frequently influence society as a whole.

- Examine sociological literature exploring societal conceptions of individuals with disabilities; these works should focus on differing views held during the time periods studied.

Appendix A

Publication Date	Title	Disability
1969	<u>Lisa, Bright and Dark</u>	Schizophrenia
1973	<u>Deenie</u>	Scoliosis
1980	<u>Waiting for Johnny Miracle</u>	Cancer leading to bone removal
1982	<u>Child of the Morning</u>	Epilepsy
1986	<u>Izzy, Willy-Nilly</u>	Amputation
1991	<u>The Monument</u>	Birth Abnormality
1993	<u>Freak the Mighty</u>	Unnamed Physical and Emotional
1996	<u>Peeling the Onion</u>	Neurological
1997	<u>Tangerine</u>	Visual
1998	<u>Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key</u>	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
1998	<u>Kissing Doorknobs</u>	Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
1998	<u>Stone Cold</u>	Pathological Gambling
1999	<u>Multiple Choice</u>	Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
2000	<u>Dovey Coe</u>	Auditory
2000	<u>Joey Pigza Loses Control</u>	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
2000	<u>Stuck in Neutral</u>	Cerebral Palsy
2000	<u>Wheel Wizards</u>	Paralysis
2001	<u>The Gypsies Never Came</u>	Birth Abnormality

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