The Disabilitymaking Factory: Manufacturing "Differences" through Children's Books

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Abstract: Noting that children’s books about disability will influence children’s opinions about disability, this article includes a review of 10 children’s books published since the year 2000 to determine possible interpretations about disability. Postmodern theory is referenced to challenge the division between disability and able-bodiedness. In essence, this article asserts that what is dangerous in children’s books about disability is the way in which they tend to uphold social structures such as disability and normalcy as authentic and therefore indisputable.

Keywords: (1) picture books, (2) disability studies, and (3) postmodernism

Introduction

The ways in which students are schooled will have a fundamental impact on their outlooks and thinking about the world. Hence, the books about disability, which educators select to examine diversity within our society and their usage in the classroom, will inevitably frame students’ opinions regarding disability. According to Saunders (2000), "A fairly extensive body of children's literature and text-books give subliminal or frankly negative messages about the supposed nature of people with disabilities, illnesses or differences, and this can be reinforced by the general absence of discussion about the subject" (pg. 1).
Unfortunately, many negative influences in our culture teach children early in life to accept the idea that certain human qualities like physical 'wholeness,' good looks, high intelligence, and clear speech, are valued and identified with high status individuals, whereas the qualities of others are demeaned, stigmatized, ridiculed, feared and degraded. Youngsters learn to assume that people with disabilities are more 'different from' than 'similar to' persons without them, and those differences lessen them and set them apart. The consequences of such beliefs result in segregation and isolation, which, in turn, reinforce negative attitudes.

Contending that children's books are influential in students' beliefs about disability, in this study I will examine 10 children's books published since the year 2000 to determine their potential messages about disability. By establishing disability as a social construct—instead of a medical fact—educators and students can begin to analyze and question the abundance of negative portrayals, misconceptions, and stereotypes surrounding disability. For instance, some detrimental disability impressions profoundly embedded in our thinking may include: "The evil prosthesis of Captain Hook, the sinister hump of Richard III, the pitiable crutch of Tiny Tim, the blind bumbling antics of Mr. Magoo, [and] the comical speech of Porky Pig" (Shapiro, 1999, pg. 3). These examples suggest that unmitigated truths about disability are being manufactured and immortalized in children's minds. Visual renderings and textual explanations about disability in children's books often attempt to present disability in a manner which suggests its portrayal is valid and indistinguishable from bodily or corporeal reality. However, these representations and descriptions have seldom been empowering. Therefore, as students learn to perceive the nature of disability as beyond doubt, they begin to speak about disability in categorical, circumscribed and stagnated ways.

On the other hand, educators can help students challenge prejudicial portrayals of disability before harmful impressions are ingrained into their psyches. Because many limiting constructions about disability have created some of the most lasting images in popular children's books, educators need to examine the knowledge or meaning about disability they impart to their students through the teaching materials they use. For example, as teachers try to find new ways of speaking about disability, they need to question how and why disability is made visible through children's books.

**Theoretical Framework**

Postmodern theory will inform my analysis of the 10 books selected for this study. Specifically, I draw from Lyotard's (1984) simplified definition of "postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives" (pg. xxiv). From this theoretical perspective, postmodernism will be used to challenge the notion that a concept such as disability, which is socially constructed, can be reproduced through artistic representations and linguistic interpretations in a way that is precise and definite. This line of reasoning begs the question: can disability ever be reproduced in such a manner?
be interpreted truthfully and accurately? Based on postmodern theory, any artistic or linguistic rendition of disability only highlights the ineffectiveness of individual perceptions, but it does not, and could not, in any way gauge the level of approximation to reality. Due to multiple and synchronous perspectives over disability, disability becomes unrepresentable as a theoretical metanarrative. This "crisis of representation" makes it difficult to specify the unfamiliar. As a result, "...the definition of disability... is inevitably a matter of social debate and social construction... in its causes, its effects, its representations, and its ramifications..." (Linton, 1998, pg. viii).

The question becomes one of legitimacy: Whose definitions and perspectives will be used to make meaning of disability's many variations? What becomes legitimate or presented in artistic representations and linguistic descriptions of disability is not the existence of disability itself, but the conventional ideas that support disability's installation as reality. Postmodernism, then, helps question the certainty of assumptions since any meaning about the human body is neutralized under an endless system of representation. Postmodernism interrogates how scientific knowledge creates epistemological structures (theoretical metanarratives) that are used to position subjects as either disabled or nondisabled. According to Appignanesi and Garratt (1995), "Critiques of science from several disciplines (sociology, philosophy, anthropology and history) have attacked science for its notion of truth and rationality... All this criticism has established that science is a social process... [and] that scientific knowledge is in fact manufactured" (pg. 109). For this reason, although the so-called disabled are still seen as "unhealthy, diseased, enfeebled people" under the medical (scientific) model of disability, disability rights activists remain skeptical about the representation of disability as factual. Hence, each of the 10 books included in this study embody multiple perspectives about disability because each writer and illustrator will always ground her or his interpretation of disability from personal observations and individual experiences.

So what is the relationship, if any, between "fiction" and "realism"? In what sense is fiction unreal and realism true? In order to pursue unconventional ways of perceiving disability we must explore its meaning from a range of possibilities. For example, unlike literature, which reader-theorist Stanley Fish associates with some sort of truth (albeit discovered by the reader), children's books can be decried as illusory in describing the "real" world. And since fiction is considered an invention of the human mind, children's fiction may be erroneously discounted as an invalid and inaccurate imitation of life. However, as stipulated by Saunders (2000), "Even when they know they are reading fiction, children are encouraged to consider that all the components reflect real life. Unhelpful attitudes are absorbed as perfectly reasonable, correct and universally valid" (pg. 9). Therefore, not only should children learn to differentiate between fiction and reality, but also, as children are encouraged to use their imagination to explore and understand their world they need to begin understanding exactly who or what shapes their imaginativeness. While I do not directly fault children's books for the damaging views about disability that exist, I do condemn the part they play in substantiating the stereotypical, inaccurate, and detrimental impressions besetting disability.
While children are being taught to notice and critique negative representations of race, class, and gender, any attempts to examine texts and corollary issues related to disability are either unsophisticated, slighted, or completely ignored. Therefore, the method for selecting the 10 books for this study does not follow a specific criterion for choosing "appropriate" books with positive portrayals of disability. Other studies have already offered such criteria (e.g., Blaska and Lynch, 1998; Wagoner, 1984; Gold, 1983; Engel, 1980). Instead, the goal of this study is to offer diverse ways of examining dissimilar portrayals (whether positive or negative) of disability in order to facilitate political and critical discussions among educators and students. However, picture books that present "scientific" and "factual" material on illness and disability, and picture books that are essentially stories to encourage general reading skills but happen to have characters with disabilities in them, should and must be judged using a criteria that upholds the social model of disability.

**Book Selection and Methodology**

For the purpose of this study, the initial step in the book selection process was to identify contemporary children's books that discussed disability either specifically or metaphorically. Three criteria were used for the final book selection: (a) include at least one animal, insect, creature or other object as a main or supporting character, (b) is fiction, and (c) published since the year 2000. This resulted in 10 books, which have been arranged in thematic order, but in no other particular methodological order: (1) *Clifford's Big Red Ideas: A Special Friend*, (2) *Goose's Story*, (3) *The Wonderful Life of a Fly Who Couldn't Fly*, (4) *Just Like You*, (5) *Otto Learns About His Medicine: A Story About Medication For Children With ADHD*, (6) *Earl the Emu*, (7) *All Kinds of Friends, Even Green!*, (8) *Elana's Ears, or How I Became the Best Big Sister in the World*, (9) *Looking Out for Sarah*, and (10) *Brian's Bird*. Following the final book selection, the next measure was to sort the books in terms of (a) containing an animal or insect with a disability, (b) exhibiting a creature or object with a disability, and (c) featuring a person with a disability alongside an animal companion.

The rationale for selecting the books for this study is based on the argument that the assumptions concerning disability as symbol can be easily expressed by presenting humans, animals, insects, or objects as disabled. Consequently, as the metaphoric application of disability is disguised by the application of a seemingly objective viewpoint, the symbolic properties begin to go unnoticed. However, my reasoning is that disability is not an arbitrary or conventional corporeal element, and that nothing is more damaging than the presentation of disability as including a moralistic element. This perception of the moral aspect of disability has developed into a practice that is used repeatedly in many literary genres. For instance, all 10 books included in this study notably conceptualize disability in relation to moral righteousness. The use of morality is firmly established as a theme in order to portray people with disabilities as possessing exceptional humanizing qualities, regardless of who or what exhibits these socially ordained disabling characteristics. Therefore, I will examine both textual and visual representations of disability as I attempt to identify the subliminal and inadvertent message that people with disabilities are essentially "different" from non-disabled persons that might otherwise go unchallenged and ultimately be internalized by young readers.
ultimately be internalized by young readers.

Books Containing an Animal or Insect with a Disability

In *Clifford's Big Red Ideas: A Special Friend*, by Liz Mills (2003), we become aware that there is something "different" about KC when he approaches Clifford, Cleo, and T-Bone at the beach and introduces himself as new to the neighborhood. Cleo reacts to KC by stating, "KC only has three legs!... He doesn’t look like us!" (pg. 5). Cleo’s initial response suggests that KC is deficient because he deviates from the norm. However, T-Bone’s response to Cleo, "But he seems friendly" (pg. 5) implies that once KC is depicted as "different" from the other dogs, his deficiency is reconfigured in terms of sameness. In this way, KC is transformed from "different" to "normal" simply by positioning his missing leg as either an important part of who he is, or as inconsequential to his persona. This manipulation of KC’s physicality helps choreograph his disabled and subsequently normalized body. Another example that substantiates KC’s physical reconfiguration from "different" to "normal" is made evident as the group climbs Rocky Point on their way to visit the lighthouse. During the climb, Clifford attempts to help KC. However, KC refuses. "But you only have three legs!" (pg. 12) states T-Bone. KC replies, "I might look different, but I’m still a dog, and I like to do dog things" (pg. 12). Once again, KC must first be depicted as "different" from the other dogs in order to re-position his body in terms of sameness.

In a similar vein, one of the things that *Goose’s Story*, by Cari Best (2002), enables us to experience is the power of fiction in formulating what we perceive to be real. In particular, the story constitutes human attributes onto the injured goose because she is likened to humans. Through the inscription of human traits, goose’s presentation as disabled contributes to the reader’s identification and perception of disability. Furthermore, goose’s characterization of her disability as ambiguous—"Unlucky goose’, says Papa, looking away. ‘Some kind of accident,’ says Mama, looking angry" (pg. 11)—only re-enforces the objectification of people with disabilities. Whenever people with disabilities are objectified, the gaze focuses on aspects or conditions of the body that are seen as ”other”. For example, as goose is exemplified by the mystery surrounding her leg, her disability or physical powerlessness is understood only in relation to an absence, lack, or deficiency.

In addition, by becoming subject to the meanings inherent in ableist discourses, Best lends intrigue to goose’s character by portraying her in a manner that eschews maudlin, an obvious tactic to garner the readers’ sympathy. However, goose can still be seen as either an object of pity or a source of inspiration. But exactly what is so interesting about goose’s character? Precisely why do we feel for goose? Is it because she seems to possess genuine human emotions or because the author twists circumstances to manipulate our sentiments? Shapiro (1993) suggests that compassion is a strong feeling because it underlines fear; mostly, non-disabled people are horrified that what happened to the disabled person might happen to them. Ultimately, *Goose’s Story* reminds us that "people project their fear of death, their unease at their physicality and mortality, onto disabled people... Disabled people are scapegoats" (Shakespeare, 1994, pg. 298). Therefore, the question is not simply whether readers sympathize with goose...
Therefore, the question is not simply whether readers sympathize with goose because she is disabled, but whether that sympathy opens up a different perspective toward people with disabilities in the "real world."

In *The Wonderful Life of a Fly Who Couldn't Fly*, by Bo Lozoff (2002), we are presented with an opportunity to challenge disability as something inauspicious, cryptic and reprehensible--creating instead an iconography of disability as incidental. Lozoff's inventive way of depicting disability goes beyond allowing the fly to develop an affirmative identity. For example, as the fly learns to accept her body and to appreciate her situation she develops a sense of independence and self-determination. In addition, cast as the antithesis to the exemplary intact body, the fly's physical variation is reinterpreted as a characteristic to be celebrated and valued. Lozoff's analytic strategy embraces a political as well as an aesthetic framework. By politicizing, in addition to aestheticizing disability, Lozoff invites the reader to question the sociopolitical dynamics that construct and then position disability as cultural otherness.

However, although Lozoff creates an effective fictional tale to present disability as a positive, advantageous and gratifying life experience, the finale is not necessarily benign--it may even be considered damaging. The conclusion implies that the moribund fly feels the need to confirm her fantasies of normality by acknowledging in public the embodiment of all and everything that she should have been--a fly who could fly. Therefore, even though the fly lives a long and happy life, her lack of wings ultimately symbolizes an unfulfilled soul, once again constituting a disabled body as a deviant body waiting to be normalized.

**Books Exhibiting a Creature or Object with a Disability**

In *Just Like You*, by Sarah Albee (2002), all the characters are Sesame Street muppets. Judy, the preschool teacher, introduces Lizzie to her new classmates. As Lizzie enters the classroom in her wheelchair "Elmo knew that it was not polite to stare. But he couldn't help it" (pg. 3). When Elmo inquires why Lizzie is in a wheelchair, Lizzie indicates, "I can't walk... I was born with something wrong with my legs..." (pg. 4). By fusing Lizzie's disabled body with a wheelchair Albee helps substantiate the association between disabled people and prosthetics. This marriage tends to produce dehumanizing representations of disability as spectacle. However, by situating her within social, environmental and attitudinal behaviors, Lizzie's personal experiences are politicized: "See that ramp? That lets people in wheelchairs get up and down instead of using the stairs" (pg. 13). This example suggests that Albee recognizes the role that architectural obstacles play in limiting or preventing access to people with physical impairments. Therefore, by exposing some of the potential disabling barriers experienced by Lizzie, which are obviously created by the physical obstacles that she encounters, Albee minimizes and even disregards Lizzies’s physical impairment as the cause of her disability. Instead, Albee suggests that people with impairments are disabled not only by intangible factors such as discrimination and prejudice, but also by notable barricades such as stairs. Furthermore, Lizzie is taken seriously because her agency is perceived as fundamentally authoritative: "Do you want Elmo to push you?" asks Elmo "No thanks, I can do it myself," replies Lizzie, "I go to physical therapy. That's where I learn how to make my body stronger" (pg. 12). Who Lizzie is, her subjectivity, is perpetually invented and re-invented inside and outside the non-disabled / disabled dualism--socially, psychologically, and...
and outside the non-disabled/disabled dualism—socially, psychologically, and physically. Lizzie’s character, therefore, expands on the idea of the self as varied and developing. The contradiction between how Lizzie sees herself and how others construct her is one example of the self as infinitely molded via diverse and conflicting discourses.

Disability is positioned differently in *Otto Learns About His Medicine: A Story About Medication For Children With ADHD*, by Matthew Galvin M.D. (2001). This particular book teaches children about medication. However, while some children with ADHD may benefit from medication, the wider issue of imposing medication to treat a condition that is often caused by external and unknown or unacknowledged chemical pollutants in our environment creates a misleading premise. Instead of exploring the external origin or nature of Otto’s distractibility, Galvin chooses to focus on medical and therapeutic methods solely directed at persons whose behavior deviates from the norm. Hence, the specific emphasis on medication to counteract Otto’s hyperactivity implies progression toward a particular point, to a final destination—as the "problem" is remedied, or at least minimized, Otto can assume a more normalized physical state. However, this perception about Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is grounded in the medical (deficit) model, which has historically been a typifying and dominant ideology surrounding disability. Consequently, this fictional story could be described as contributing "to the medicalization of disability, in which disability is regarded as an individual misfortune... that medicine can and should treat, cure, or at least prevent" (Wendell, 2001, pg. 17). Treatment, cure, and prevention, in turn, have become generalized concepts into which all types and aspects of disability are incorporated. It is thus, that medicalization creates a culture aimed at normalization based on the idea that to achieve normality the individual must be made whole and healthy.

Books Featuring a Person with a Disability alongside an Animal Companion

In *Earl the Emu*, by Pat Winston (2000), Jason pays a visit to his grandparents Farmer and Mrs. Berry at the Berry Farm. But "Jason was different from other children... Something was wrong with one of his legs, so he wore a leg brace" (pg. 6). Because he could not participate in many of the activities that other children played, Jason’s grandparents often told him that "People who are different play an important part in the lives of others. God has a purpose for those who are different" (pg. 6). Consequently, Jason’s use of a brace creates an image of an incomplete child. In this way, Winston constructs disability as a lack to be filled, and as an insufficiency to be made good. Hence, Farmer Berry’s desire to surprise Jason with a special and unique friend (an emu bird) suggests his need to define Jason’s purpose in life by making sense of Jason’s physical condition. Farmer and Mrs. Berry’s attempt to rationalize Jason’s leg marks their struggle to reestablish their faith: "'God has a light that shines in all of us,' smiled Farmer Berry. 'When God makes some people and animals different, that light shines especially bright inside them...'" (pg. 22). The act of justifying Jason’s leg, then, is symbolic of the Berry’s attempt to assimilate themselves into other "normal" families. In this way, the Berrys judge themselves with reference to a Godly or metaphysical norm, but their struggle entails fusing abnormality or dysfunction with the normality that is established and recognized by mundane, social consensus. Therefore, Jason simply acknowledges, and accepts, the normative
consensus. Therefore, Jason simply acknowledges, and accepts, the normative domains from which his leg is classified as ineffective. As a result, Jason congenially constructs himself in relation to opposing hierarchical meanings informed by the non-disabled / disabled dualism. In addition, the moralistic type of ableism that is profoundly embedded throughout the story demands that as the farm animals attempt to interpret "proper" emu behavior, they inadvertently try to impose a common order to Earl. Based on conformity and normalization, they assimilate Earl into the greater normative social structure. Initially, the farm animals do not like Earl because he looks strange. Therefore, Jason comforts Earl by stating: "Don't worry, Earl... Sometimes people make fun of me, too" (pg. 12). However, after Earl uses his long, awkward looking neck to rescue Little Max—a baby chick—from drowning, Earl is proclaimed a hero and all the farm animals befriend him. Earl's heroic endeavor is used to confirm the moral of the story, which Jason sums-up: "'Gee, Grandpops. Now I know what you and Granny mean. God really does have a purpose for those who are different. Just like Earl.' 'Just like you, too, Jason,' replied Farmer Berry" (pg. 21).

Another interpretation of disability is found in All Kinds of Friends, Even Green! by Ellen B. Senisi (2002) in which Moses, a seven-year-old boy with spina bifida and sacral agenesis is shown learning alongside his disabled and non-disabled peers. All the students are asked to write about friendship and Moses decides to write about his very unique friendship with Zaki, his neighbor's iguana who is missing toes from her hind feet. After explaining that Zaki's condition was induced by blood sucking mites, Moses indicates why he especially likes Zaki: "She figures out how to get where she wants to be... She's like me" (pg. 22). Lamentably, Senisi overlooks the ambiguous relationship between chronic illness and disability. Although chronic illness often engenders disability, impairment is not always accompanied by illness. Moreover, the association of disability with illness does nothing more than perpetuate the myth that people with disabilities are unhealthy. As a result, this puzzling discrepancy frequently leads to misrepresented and misinformed portrayals about people with disabilities. For example, while Moses' chronic illnesses may require extensive and ongoing medical care, Zaki is healthy, and her impairment does not necessitate medical attention. This distinction is an important one to make because a need for services and/or equipment to perform daily tasks is unlike a need for medication and/or intervention from a physician. Therefore, in order to challenge the medical (deficit) model, the story should have emphasized that while Moses' body is exceptionally medicalized because of his particular illnesses, not all people with disabilities have medical, physical and/or psychological burdens requiring cure or care. Furthermore, some people's quality of life—if not life itself—may depend on access to certain medications. They may thus be disabled if they do not have access to the medications, and nondisabled if they do have access. Therefore, access to the medication, and thereby their "disability," will depend on social and economic factors.

To further illustrate the inconclusive, yet entirely deterministic nature of disability, Elana's Ears, or How I Became the Best Big Sister in the World, by Gloria Roth Lowell (2000), positions the hearing world as the only knowable and worthwhile reality. In this model, the push towards sameness is treated as commonsensical, which in turn leads to Elana's indoctrination into the hearing world through the use of hearing aids. Her progression from a supposedly bleak
world through the use of hearing aids. Her progression from a supposedly bleak status as a deaf subject to a spirited point as a hearing agent is used to signal her newfound autonomy and independence. Her metamorphosis is synonymous with becoming a whole person. As a completed person Elana is now better able to accept responsibility for her own actions--and such responsibility is understood to emanate from normative spheres. What is assumed is that as long as Elana is deaf she will be in the hands of those who are squarely situated in the dominant and powerful hearing world. This rendition of deafness fails to imagine what life would be like outside dualistic logic. In addition, this depiction assumes that Elana is deficient, and therefore, subordinate.

In *Looking Out for Sarah*, by Glenna Lang (2001), Sarah's experience with blindness can be examined concurrently from at least three frameworks--feminism, sexism and ableism. As a woman with blindness, Sarah is distinctly depicted as an active, outgoing and mature woman. Instead of staying home feeling depressed and/or defeated, Sarah is very much in the public's eye. Put simply, Sarah's resolve clearly helps her surmount social and cultural barriers--even though the story does not reference such obstacles. On the other hand, Sarah is dependent on her male dog Perry, not only for companionship, but also to help her "overcome" her disability. The story's ulterior message is that without Perry, Sarah's capabilities and opportunities would be greatly circumscribed. Also, since Sarah's blindness is not readily apparent, Perry is used to signal a disorder or dysfunction in her body. Finally, Sarah is portrayed as single and motherless, with Perry as her sole companion. Moreover, Sarah is presented with an androgynous demeanour, which suggests that she is asexual and not recognised as a real woman. Schriempf (2001) would argue that this depiction "undoubtedly originates in society's general assumption that disabled people are unable to have sex (pg. 54).

A different interpretation of blindness, *Brian's Bird*, by Patricia A. Davis (2000), challenges the apprehension that blindness is something somber, mystifying, dreadful, and ultimately disabling. For example, although Brian's blindness is made evident by his cane, he is far from dismal, enigmatic, appalling, and incapacitated. Furthermore, Brian's loving family treats him respectfully and provides support only when requested from Brian. Hence, Brian appears happy and well adjusted. Since the disabling barriers of inequitable access and pejorative attitudes are not an issue for Brian in his home, Brian is not construed solely in relation to his blindness. Instead, Brian's subjectivity is recognized and valued by championing his personal interpretation of the world as an eight-year-old African American boy, who just so happens to have blindness. In addition, framing the story around Brian's parakeet Scratchy opens up the possibility to visualize Brian in multiple and ordinary contexts. Correspondingly, no attempt is made to normalize the nature of Brian's experiences, even though the pressure to do so is colossal in light of ableist discourses that construct blindness as melancholic and pitiful.

**Implications and Conclusions**

Even though the 10 books examined in this study create fictional worlds constituted within the bonds of the non-disabled / disabled dualism, by questioning the relationship between disability and normalcy, teachers can
questioning the relationship between disability and normalcy, teachers can either initiate or continue to lead conversations about the interconnection between disability and able-bodiedness. Recognizing the power and influence of children’s literature, children’s books possess the rare and extraordinary opportunity to expose stereotypes, and challenge misconceptions. For example, in *Brian's Bird*, Brian’s "reality" can easily make us forget the unfavorable and even dangerous consequences that often result from living with impairments, which stem from society’s attempt to control the nonconformist body. Hence, what is perilous in children’s books that have disability as a theme is the degree to which it can authenticate its presumed opposite: normality. However, teachers can take advantage of damaging interpretations that misrepresent disabled people by politicizing the experiences of people with disabilities and by concentrating on disability as a sociopolitical phenomenon.

This perceived reality determines *how* and *what* teachers decide to teach about disability. Mohanty (1991) suggests that knowledge "is a directly political and discursive practice in that it is purposeful and ideological. It [knowledge] is best seen as a mode of intervention into particular hegemonic discourses... There can, of course, be no apolitical scholarship" (pg. 53). It is precisely this ableist power to homogenize and systematize or categorize the human body that must be named, defined, and contested. The construction of disability as a detrimental physical condition has left a deep residue on schooling. As a result, teachers are left with discriminatory and oppressive frameworks, which must be countered and resisted. It is within this process of countering and resisting that negative messages about disability can be scrutinized and challenged. As teachers analyze the "legitimate" or "official" knowledge of the medical (deficit) model of disability, they will begin to uncover how those who position themselves as members of the "nondisabled privileged" use ableist discourses to produce disability. These disabled "Others" in turn are constructed as a homogeneous and powerless group that are either helpless victims and/or weak and undeserving.

Therefore, I want to emphasize that the construction of the disabled subject can only result from recognizing disability as divergent from nondisability. If personal opinion is formed in terms of disability being manufactured in relation to the other or nondisabled, then in what ways do opinions fixed on the "other" empower the *nondisabled other* whom it privileges and disempower the *disabled other* whom it does not favor? And, how might we begin to reconceptualize a framework wherein nondisabled subjects do not necessarily or exclusively operate relative to their disabled others?

The very sense of a disabled subject is misinformed because it tends to conceptualize disability in terms of visibility. According to Kelly Oliver (2001), "many contemporary theorists of society and culture talk about power in terms of visibility. To be empowered is to be visible; to be disempowered is to be rendered invisible. To be recognized is to be visible; to be misrecognized or not recognized is to be rendered invisible" (pg. 11). Kaomea (2000), however, uses a critical analysis of the relationship among knowledge, authority and power to argue "increased visibility does not always mean increased understanding, prestige, self-esteem, or power" (pg. 341).
Disability rights activists are re-defining meanings and values of disability in an attempt to cease categorizing people based on corporeal signification, by refusing to recognize individuals with certain bodily configurations as disabled. In other words, disability rights activists have discovered a power to act based on how human bodies are classified and bounded by an ableist form of social organization. According to Belsey (1980), "meaning is socially constructed, and the social construction of the signifying system is intimately related, therefore, to the social formation itself" (pg. 42). As a result, our basic conception of disability needs to be regrounded in a politics of resistance that is fundamentally rooted in misrecognition. Corporeal differences constructed by ableist discourses often appear to be natural, ubiquitous, and ironclad when in actuality they are manufactured by a particular configuration of social structures. Therefore, I suggest that the representation or recognition of "disability" in the 10 books examined here do not necessarily compliment the goals of the disability rights movement. As disabled bodies come into being, their meaning "is inscribed in signifying practices--in discourses, myths, presentations and re-presentations of the way 'things' 'are'"... (Belsey, 1980, pg. 42). In light of this argument, it is imperative that we continue to critically and thoroughly reflect upon the books that feature people with disabilities, particularly those presented to children.

References:


Biographical Note:

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Literature Sources: Blaska, Joan K. "Children’s Literature That Includes Characters With Disabilities or Illnesses." Disability Studies Quarterly 24.1 (2004): n. pag. Web. Solis, Santiago. "The Disabilitymaking Factory: Manufacturing "Differences" through Children’s Books." Disability Studies Quarterly 24.1 (2004): n. pag. Web. We describe the characteristics of children’s consumer knowledge, skills, and values at each stage and specify the approximate ages at which children move from one stage to the next. Children move through three stages of consumer socialization—which we have named the perceptual stage, the analytical stage, and the reflective stage (see Table 1). These stages are characterized along a number of dimensions that capture important shifts in knowledge development, decision-making skills, and purchase influence strategies. Children’s play have uncovered nuanced differences in how children’s play is structured, (Long, 2007). For example, the use of emotion appears more restrained in the pretend. The relationships children form through school have been theorized to be instrumental in their access to resources and supports that, transmitted through these relationships, can foster the realization of academic and career goals.