

THE ANIMOSITY OF AN AWARD:
AN AWARD'S ACCLAIM VERSUS A SIBLING'S ACTUALITY

by

ALEXANDRA RAYE LAMPP

(Under the Direction of Silvia Nogueron-Liu)

ABSTRACT

Research indicates that award winning children's literature can be used to better understand the experiences of the (dis)abled community. (Dis)ability in children's literature is seen clearly in the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award young adult novel winning texts. Using the methods of autoethnography and literary analysis, this study explores the representation of (dis)abled and non(dis)abled individuals, specifically siblings, the narrators of many of the novels in question. To do this, these works were analyzed and compared against the researcher's own lived experiences regarding the (dis)abled community. The theories framing this analysis were social constructionism, critical literacy, and Nikolajeva's Theory of Narrativity. The findings suggest that these texts present relevant portrayals of a sibling or other family member's reality. However, some portrayals of (dis)ability featured in the works remain static and do not properly portray the fluidity of the (dis)abled identity.

INDEX WORDS: (Dis)ability, children's literature, young adult novels, Dolly Gray
Children's Literature Award, supersiblings, social constructionism,
identity, critical literacy, literary analysis, narrativity

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ALEXANDRA RAYE LAMPP

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by
ALEXANDRA RAYE LAMPP

Major Professor: Silvia Nogueron-Liu

Committee: Donna Alvermann
Denise Davila

Electronic Version Approved:

Julie Coffield
Interim Dean of the Graduate School
University of Georgia
May 2015

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my brother, Spencer. Thank you for inspiring me every day with your intelligence, hard work, support, love, and one of a kind outlook on life. You are one of the most determined and honest souls that I know, and I could not imagine my live without you. You have made me who I am today. Remember: *You're my big little brother. You're my big little brother, and I will always love love love you.*

To Michael and Max, my sanity. You both keep me going when I want to give up. Thank you so much for everything you do on a daily basis. Michael, I love you more than words can say, and I cannot wait until June 11, 2016 when I become your wife. Max, you are the light of my life. Thank you for giving me the chance to be your puppy mom.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The visibility of a particular culture can be shaped by countless outside mediums of representation. For example, award-winning children's literature is a relevant resource in the understanding of the (dis)abled community. Particularly, the visibility of this marginalized community is shaped by the contributions of the Schneider Family Book Award and the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award, which both recognize the quality of books about the (dis)abled experience. While the impact and content of award-winning books has been researched in previous empirical and literary analysis work (Hilbun, 2010; Michaels, 2012; Shackford, 1977), scholarship about these awards, notably the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award, remains limited (Dyches & Prater, Robertson, 1992; Vasa, 1991; Ward, 2002, Curwood, 2013). To fill this very wide gap in scholarship, the work featured in this thesis analyzes the ten young adult novel winners of the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award. To do this, the research was framed with the theories of social constructionism, critical literacy, and Nikolajeva's Theory of Narrativity. Additionally, the methodologies of autoethnography and literary analysis was used to compare the researcher's own lived experiences to the content of the ten winners of the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award and then to closely examine two of the ten specified winning texts.

A Realization of Self and of Study Possibilities

“I know *exactly* what you are.” I vividly remember when those words were spoken to me. I can still envision the determined yet cautious look on my friend’s face as she uttered that statement. Although, at the time, I simply shrugged off her sentence and politely accepted the copy of the *New York Times* article she had printed for me that supposedly explained her declaration. I just assumed she was one of the many who thought they knew me and could categorize me into the same clique or bestow upon me the same physical or personality trait I had been or always known for decades now; I’m the good girl, the smart one, the quiet student in the corner, and the tallest woman you had ever seen. However, this conversation crept back into my consciousness later that evening and would not escape until I picked up the article, read the title, “Her Autistic Brothers,” realized that, yes, she actually knows who I am, deep down. Yet, my own journey to self-discovery was only beginning.

After reading Olsson’s (2007) *New York Times* piece, I couldn’t shake this feeling that someone—I didn’t know who—but someone, on a far grander scale than my good friend, understood who I was, who I am. In the article, Olsson describes an individual, much like myself but, someone referred to as a “supersibling.” Essentially, supersiblings are “children who are especially sensitive and responsible as a result of growing up with someone with a disability” (Olsson, 2007). Additionally, another important characteristic of a supersibling is feeling like he or she may “want to not cause any problems for their parents because their parents are already upset about their brother or sister” (Olsson). For many years, I knew that I was different than my friends and other peers I had grown up with. I felt more mature and empathetic and strangely more anxious, all three of which are common attributes of a supersibling. It wasn’t until much later that I had an inkling that these early onset developmental mannerisms were the product of

my relationship with my younger brother, Spencer, who is also autistic. Yet, I finally realized, with tears welling up inside of me while simultaneously experiencing an eerie calmness, at the conclusion of Olsson's piece that *I* may finally know who I am. I am who my friend, researchers, Karen Olsson, and countless others knew I was all along. Along many other things, I am a supersibling. This experience of being a supersibling has fueled my curiosity and led me to study this particular heuristic of the familial identity formation found within the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award.

An Exploration of the Past, the Present, and a Purpose

This emotionally complicated process of identity construction became the impetus for my current project. I knew then that I wanted to craft a study that would aid me in my journey to discover more about the phenomenon of being and becoming a supersibling. To do this, I combined two of my passions—(dis)ability studies and children's literature—and examined the implications that award-winning children has on the subjects of its contents. Specifically, I analyzed the ten young adult novel winners of the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award, as they feature (dis)abled and non-(dis)abled protagonists that strongly resemble my own brother, myself, and our lived experiences. To do this, I consistently framed my work with the theories of social constructionism, critical literacy, and Nikolajeva's theory of narrativity. Additionally, I draw from the methodologies of autoethnography to compare my own lived experiences to the content of the ten winners of the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award and also literary analysis to then closely examine two of the ten specified winning texts.

In order to fully grasp the gravity of this particular award and, more narrowly, my research, a brief introduction of the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award is in order. The Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award is a children's literature award that is sponsored by The

Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities (DADD) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) in collaboration with the Special Needs Project. This decoration is given every other year to author(s) or illustrator(s), if applicable, that create and disseminate “high quality fictional and biographical children, intermediate, and young adult books that appropriately portray individuals with developmental disabilities” (Council for Exceptional Children). In the fourteen years since its establishment, The Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award has been given to the authors and illustrators of six picturebooks and ten young adult novels. The winners of the latter category and their works, beginning with the first awardee in 2000 and ending with the most recent in 2014, are as follows: *Tru Confessions* by Janet Tashjian, *Me and Rupert Goody* by Barbara O’Connor, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon, *So B. It* by Sarah Weeks, *A Small White Scar* by K. A. Nuzum, *The London Eye Mystery* by Siobhan Dowd, *Waiting for No One* by Beverly Brenna, *Mockingbird* by Kathryn Erskine, *Memoirs of an Imaginary Friend* by Matthew Dicks, and *Remember Dippy* by Shirley Reva Vernick.

The award’s namesake, Dolly Gray, was (dis)abled herself, as she was born with severe cerebral palsy. Gray, despite many hardships, “was greeted with much acceptance and benefited from that understanding for which literature is partly responsible” (Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award). Due to the impact literature had on her own life, she believed immensely in the power of the written word, and “it was in part as if the world shared itself with her through them [books]” (Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award). Moreover, Gray expressed knowledge of the reciprocity of this relationship. In this way, award-winning children’s literature, particularly works that possess the Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award, are a relevant

resource in the understanding of the reality and identities of (dis)abled individuals and those closest to them.

To explain, the visibility of the (dis)abled community and its affiliates are shaped by the contributions of literary awards like the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award. Publications and presentations at conferences have not only elaborated upon the components of renowned children's literature, similar to the young adult novels and the picturebooks that have won the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award, but have also divulged the importance these awards have for teachers and librarians alike. These honors aid in the process of choosing the best books for their classrooms and libraries. Moreover, prolific awards ensure that books that receive the acclaimed title will remain in publication and become classics (Brodie, Hill, and White, 2001).

While this impact and also the content of award-winning children's literature has been researched in previous empirical and literary analysis research (Hilbun, 2010; Michaels, 2012; Shackford, 1977), scholarship regarding the examination of the (dis)ability in children's literature remains quite limited. Research that delves into awards similar to the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award and other literature that features (dis)abled characters has been appearing as of late (Dyches & Prater; Robertson, 1992; Vasa, 1991; Ward, 2002; Curwood, 2013), but little work has been completed that attempts to divulge the intricacies of the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award and, distinctively, the relationship had between a (dis)abled individual and his or her sibling as seen through a literary lens. This lack of research led me to formulate and attempt to answer the following research questions: "What themes emerge in a content analysis of the young adult novel winners, from 2000 to 2014, of the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award? How do these themes relate to my lived experiences, connections, and disconnections with the texts?" and "What themes or issues emerge in the literary analysis of

the young adult titles that have won the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award and also feature sibling narrators?"

My research will attempt to fill this gap by bringing forth new evidence that dually praises and critically reflects upon the construction of both the (dis)abled and the sibling identity in award-winning children's literature. Furthermore, possible implications of this study include spreading awareness and acceptance among those within the educational sphere and beyond of potentially damaging stereotypes and portrayals of (dis)ability. Similarly, depictions of family members are also addressed, as these occurrences are, too, important. Many children and young adults who have a (dis)abled sibling or family member face a much different reality at home than what they put forth at school. I was one of those children and eventually a member of the young adult conglomerate. Now, as an adult, I know that being exposed to literature such as this would have positively influenced my own construction of identity. With this in mind, I hope that my thesis aids individuals who are like me, supersiblings, and also others who are not, those who are just trying to figure out who or what they are, in regards to interactions with the (dis)abled community.

In the subsequent chapters of this thesis, I investigate the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award's young adult novel winners in an attempt to answer my primary research questions. Each chapter features a different aspect of the research. Chapter Two, the Literature Review, presents an assessment of (dis)ability and normalcy and their place in children's literature alongside an examination of identity. Additionally, this chapter also features introductions to the theoretical frameworks that I use: social constructionism, critical literacy, and Nikolajeva's Theory of Narrativity. Chapter Three then relays my use of the

autoethnography and literary analysis methodologies, or the processes I undertook when completing this research. Chapters Four and Five include the presentation and analysis of all of my findings from both Research Question One and Research Question Two. Lastly, Chapter Six reveals the conclusions I have drawn from my findings and any implications that my research has on the educational, (dis)abled, and literary communities.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before commencing a discussion of the actual research and all of its many parts and processes, a brief review of the relevant literature is necessary to understand the context in which my work is situated. A historical view of (dis)ability and normalcy, a chronicling of (dis)ability in children's literature, and a succinct glimpse at identity is presented in the following chapter.

A Damaging Dichotomy: Normalcy Versus (Dis)ability

From the perspective of the medical and social media models of (dis)ability, a damaging dichotomy exists, one that derives from a common belief, an insistence to focus solely on the (dis)ability that one person may possess. This division is that of normalcy and (dis)ability. Beginning with the topic of normalcy, Lennard J. Davis (1995) provides the importance of exploring normalcy by explaining, "I do this because the 'problem' is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the disabled person" (Davis, p. 24). Davis explains that the issue at hand is not (dis)ability; the "problem" is the concept of and consequences created by normalcy itself (p. 24). In many ways, normalcy has essentially created (dis)ability.

Similarly, McDermott and Verenne's (1995) culture-as-disability approach aligns with Davis' view by asserting that "every culture, as a historically evolved pattern of institutions, teaches people what to aspire to and hope for and marks off those who are to be noticed, handled, and mistreated, and remediated as falling short" (p. 336). Culture, although it enables many practices, plays a role as a co-creator of (dis)ability by facilitating the aspiration to be normal or

contained in the sphere of normalcy. Simply put, “one cannot be disabled alone” (McDermott and Verenne, p. 337). Below, I will venture to briefly unearth the long and sordid history of (dis)ability, which, as I mentioned above, was first and still is instigated by normalcy.

This ambition towards and the simultaneous damnation of others enacted by normalcy is not a new desire by any means. To explain, Nielsen (2012), in an attempt to trace (dis)ability’s history within the United States, dissects the Colonial Period when it seems the stigmatization in question first began to occur. During that time, those with (dis)abilities were originally labeled as “poor,” “infirm,” and even “vicious” and subsequently banished from early colonial communities (Nielsen, p. 12). Nielsen further reveals that after the birth of the nation, the (dis)abled were no longer banished but still seen as “deviant,” which led to the formation of institutes for the “mentally (dis)abled” that continued to exist well into the twentieth century (p. 49). These acts of malice did not stop at the institutionalization of individuals with (dis)abilities and included the “forced sterilization of more than sixty five thousand 'unfit' Americans by the 1960s” and increasingly restrictive immigration laws, particularly towards individuals who possessed “physical defects” (Nielsen, p. 100).

However, beginning in the early 1900’s, individuals with varying (dis)abilities became activists. Some wrote letters to various law-making politicians. Others formed picket lines. Nielsen owes this movement to the “federal policy changes generated in response to the Great Depression [which] created new opportunities for people with disabilities” (Nielsen, p. 131). Remnants of this fight for equality are still evident today, because life and the laws that govern the lives of those with (dis)abilities still contain prejudice and discrimination despite the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. With the fight for justice still continuing, there

has also been much discrepancy concerning the various meanings of and theories surrounding (dis)ability itself.

Corker and French (1999) expound upon this uncertainty by asserting that “much of the uneasiness that we have with the current framework of disability theory stems from its failure to conceptualize a mutually constitutive relationship between impairment and disability which is both materially and discursively (socially) produced” (p. 6). As a society, it seems as though individuals are fearful of this “D Word,” of being “different,” “(dis)abled,” or “disadvantaged;” we are afraid of the very thing we have created. Furthermore, the act of labeling someone (dis)abled is simply frowned upon. This convention is not present, because society is unsure of what (dis)ability means to each and every individual. As McDermott and Verenne (1995) contend, the anxiety surrounding this term is due to the following reason:

The cultural ascription of disability is an occasional and monument event in most lives, and the members of our culture, at their worst, and horrors, *at their most cultured*, have been actively making the ascription of disability a constant event in the lives of an increasing number of persons” (p. 332).

(Dis)ability is defining in a very permanent sense, and this labeling occurs from outside forces. Cameron and Swain (1999) include, “The discourse is predominantly around the labeling *of* rather than *by* disabled people—that is, self-referent labeling—except when this is understood as an acceptance of labeling by others” (p. 68).

Moreover, the individuals who are being labeled hardly ever object. Many simply “accept the labeling by others” (Cameron & Swain, 1999, p. 68). The issue, the panic or social anxiety associated with employing the term (dis)ability, is not housed within the word itself or its meaning but its origin, user, and intent. The utilization of the label in question has evolved into

an insult, deriving from the lack of ownership or ability to overcome a reproachful stigmatization and the gradual acceptance of the term by the (dis)abled community. Although, within the past twenty years, a movement pushing for the “self-referent labeling” mentioned above has taken place. This campaign’s catalyst is the social media model of (dis)ability. This model also informs one of my own theoretical lenses, as it stems from a social constructionist view of the (dis)abled identity, as explained in the following paragraph.

The social media model of disability “denies that any particular attributes or functioning of individual bodies should be thought to constitute a 'problem' or 'disadvantage' apart from the social environment within which the individuals live” (Corker & Shakespeare, 2002, p. xii). This denial of the problematic and disadvantaged definition created the postmodern spelling of (dis)ability or dis/ability. The separation within this word also further represents the wish for the (dis)abled identity to be seen as “multiple, fluid, and interactive” (Schaller, 2008, p. 5).

This new somewhat disjointed definition is inspired by the work of Hubert J. M. Hermans (2006) and his notion of the “dialogical self,” which stemmed from theories originated by William James and Mikhail Bakhtin. To explain, Hermans (2006) creates an elaborate theater metaphor in which actors place their beings at different places, interacting with one another in several “forms of dialogue: agreement, disagreement, negotiation, opposition, and conflict” (Hermans, p. 148). In this way, an individual with a (dis)ability can be seen as much more than his or her (dis)ability. He or she has many other aspects of his or her identity that are present, constantly vying for attention, and commonly overlooked. The disjunction caused the parenthesis or slash, aids in this oversight, and allows an individual to remove the (dis) from (dis)ability in order to show his or her multifaceted nature, his or her abilities.

Defining Myself: Identity and the Culture of (Dis)ability

Aligned with Herman's (2006) concept of the dialogical self, an individual's identity has many different, intricate layers. However, identity, much like (dis)ability, is an extremely abstract concept. Before delving into the complex outside forces that play a role in identity construction, it is extremely important to attempt to first define identity as an entity itself. To begin, many scholars have ventured into this realm of the self. Most notably, Gee (2001) defines identity as "being recognized as a certain 'kind of person'" (p. 99). Furthermore, he provides four different ways to view identity. They are as follows: Nature-Identity (N-Identity), Institution-Identity (I-Identity), Discourse-Identity (D-Identity), and Affinity-Identity (A-I).

The N-Identity is formed from forces in nature. The I-Identity occurs within institutions and is authorized by higher powers. The D-Identity is made from an individual characteristic that is mentioned within dialogue had with others. Finally, the Affinity-Identity includes shared practices among like-minded groups (Gee, 2001, p. 101-105). In this regard, my brother has many different ascribed identities, as do I and everyone else. Gee inserts that these four identities "may very well all be present and woven together as a person acts within a given context" (p. 101). For example, in different circumstances, my brother is known to be my younger brother or the baby of our family, a high school sophomore, an individual with autism, and a Nintendo gaming aficionado. In this regard, I, too, am given labels. I am recognized to be my brother's older sister, a graduate student at a prestigious research university in the southeastern portion of the United States, a supersibling, and a member of several affinity groups that will remain undisclosed at this time. Although, I must admit that these are my own renditions of myself using my "interpretive system" (Gee, p. 107). I use history, culture, and my understanding to form these opinions.

This interconnected existence and interpretation of one's identity is incredibly significant, specifically in the spheres of sociology and anthropology and with implications in education. Lee & Anderson (2009) assert "Many scholars believe that identity—whether understood as a way of belonging, as a category for policy making, or in a myriad other ways—is intricately tied to ways that we interact, learn, and teach (e.g., Ball & Ellis, 2007; Hall, 1996; Nasir, 2002; Norton, 1997; Sadowski, 2003)" (p. 182). Similarly, Bonny Norton (1997) describes identity as "how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future" (p. 410). Although Norton implements her definition in the field of second language acquisition, I find her definition of identity to be extremely cohesive to my own interpretation of this idea of one's interpretation of the self. To explain, I do believe my identity to be my "relationship to the world," specifically the impact that the people and objects I interact with have had on me during my time on this planet. Through this project, I explain this impact explicitly by detailing the way that my brother's (dis)ability has had a large role in crafting my identity.

Simply put, the creation of one's identity is consequential. Moreover, the many intersecting and diverging factors that go into bringing this identity into existence is also valuable when thinking introspectively, learning of others, and subsequently crafting scholarly research from these thoughts. Yet, there is much discrepancy concerning the amount of vigor involved in scholarly work involving identity. Lee and Anderson's (2009) work reveals:

...Yet there has also been a good deal of criticism on how identity has been conceptualized and operationalized for scholarly use. For example, many treatments of identity have not been theoretically transparent in terms of their ontology and

epistemology; therefore, they are limited in their usefulness (Sfard & Prusak, 2005)” (p. 184).

Notwithstanding this controversy, this project’s goal is to narrate my own identity alongside the characters and their corresponding identities that have been written into award-winning young adult novels. As many of the characters in the text, my identity has been and is molded by another’s (dis)ability, but other outside forces, such as my other family members, the destinations I have explored, the schools I have attended, and the literature I have read have also had an role in this formation.

By reading the ten novels in question I continue to form my own identity, as it is never fully complete, and analyzed others’ fictional and actual identities as well. Florio-Ruane (2001) explicates my process, as it parallels her own when she writes:

By telling my story and reading or hearing another’s, I am a stranger negotiating meaning among strangers. I find some points of potential contact; make mistakes or miscues; become more aware of my prior knowledge and its limits; construct new understandings” (p. 32).

As Florio-Ruane indicated, my experience with these ten texts shape my identity by changing preconceived notions I once had, allowing me to gaze inside the mind of others both alike and differing from myself, and simply reflect upon myself and my actions. As I have made evident, these novels are extremely beneficial to me and, I’m sure, others. The following section will further expand upon the value of children’s literature and the impact it has had on society as a whole, the culture of (dis)ability, and, subsequently, myself by featuring a brief history of (dis)ability in children’s literature and the inception of awards that honor those that have chosen to depict this often overlooked culture.

(Dis)ability in Children's Literature

Many authors of children's literature have created characters who are members of the (dis)abled community or who align themselves with the culture of (dis)ability. One of the very first creators of literary fairy tales, Hans Christian Andersen, is one of these individuals. However, he did so in a very subtle, some would say malign, manner that could be almost unnoticeable to the uncritical eye. Vivian Yenika-Agbaw (2011) first discussed Andersen's ability to seamlessly and disrespectfully weave characters with a (dis)ability into his fiction by analyzing four stories by the renowned author. An excerpt from Yenika-Agbaw's findings is included below:

In the case of the four tales—"The Little Mermaid" (1937), "The Brave Tin Soldier" (1838), "Little Tiny or Thumbelina" (1835), and "The Ugly Duckling" (1843)—the fact that the characters have disabilities defines their place in the social order within their imagined worlds. In a way, Andersen uses their disabilities, construed as "an alien condition," (Snyder and Brueggeman, 2) to heighten their otherness, and consequently ranks them at the bottom of the social ladder, even below able-bodied animals (p. 92).

Having the illustrious Hans Christian Andersen, the namesake of the most coveted award in children's literature and a beloved author known around the world, as a role model, many other authors throughout the years have attempted to emulate his example and also, perhaps unknowingly, presented (dis)abled characters in an extremely poor light, as outliers of an unwelcoming society.

Even in the late twentieth century, as John Quicke (1985) divulged, many books which included characters with (dis)abilities tended to be educational in nature and poor in quality. The texts of the 1970's and 1980's were filled with bland diction, weak and somewhat predictable

plots, one-dimensional characters and counterproductively disregarded other problematic aspects of society while solely focusing on integrating characters with a (dis)ability (*The Four of Us*, Beresford, 1981; *A Friendship of Equals*, Wilson, 1981; *The Flash Children*, Allan, 1979).

Moreover, the disregard to accuracy could especially be seen in the depiction of the characters found in the often cartoon-like and impersonal illustrations (*I Have Diabetes*, Braithwaite, 1983; *I Use a Wheelchair*, Braithwaite, 1983; *Jane Has Asthma*, Snell, 1981).

Despite a long and irreversible past filled with damaging literature, it seems as though, during the last fifteen to twenty years, many authors have finally started to depict characters with (dis)abilities differently. Distinctly, between the years of 1999 and 2005, approximately twenty-five percent of young adult novels published contained some representation of (dis)ability (Koss & Teale, 2009). In fact, Australian author Susanne Gervay (2004) observes the following:

Increasingly, disability has become a small but legitimate thematic area drawing slowly into its net some important literary children's authors. Award winning children's authors... have addressed disability in their books and have help shift the paradigm in writing from stereotypical representation to realist and meaningful stories of human beings.

With these prolific figures in the world of children's literature as new figureheads, fellow writers will hopefully follow in their footsteps, so to speak, and the expansion of the (dis)ability in picturebooks and young adult novels experienced in recent years can continue to grow and flourish.

Children's Literature Awards: Creating Awareness and Promoting Advocacy

With the positive inclusion of (dis)abled characters in picture books and young adult novels on the rise (Koss & Teale, 2009), especially considering the works recently published by notable authors, there is no doubt as to why awards, like the Council for Exceptional Children's

Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities' Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award (2000) and the American Library Association's Schneider Family Book Award (2004), have been created to applaud the authors and illustrators who have attempted to truthfully and eloquently portray the (dis)abled community. Distinctly, the Dolly Gray Children's Literature award honors authors and illustrators who are creating "high quality fictional and biographical children, intermediate, and young adult books that appropriately portray individuals with developmental disabilities" (Council for Exceptional Children). Despite its admirable mission and growing popularity, I have found that no one has yet attempted to critically investigate the literary elements of the representations of (dis)ability as conveyed through the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award young adult novel winners.

While the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award has received little attention, much research has previously been conducted in regards to the most prolific children's literature awards found in English-speaking countries, such as the United States' Newberry Medal (1922), the Caldecott Medal (1938), the United Kingdom's Carnegie Medal (1937) and Kate Greenaway Award (1956), New Zealand's Esther Glen Award (1945), Australia's Book of the Year Awards (1946), and the Canadian Library Association's Book of the Year for Children Award (1947). Children's literature scholars have investigated the format, genre, characters, themes and plots, philosophy and spiritual beliefs, and also traditions and customs found within the content of award-winning texts (Hilbun, 2010; Michaels, 2012; Shackford, 1977).

To elaborate upon these studies, Hilbun (2010) looked to inform librarians of children's book awards from all over the globe, not just in one's country of origin. Additionally, Hilbun extends the knowledge that these award-winning texts can help children and educators alike to highlight both the similarities and differences that various cultures may possess. She further

stresses the importance this knowledge has in regards to a child's education (Hilbun, p. 1). Michaels (2012), too, takes a critical look into the world of children's literature award but chooses to solely focus on the Carnegie Medal. She reveals that this award has surprisingly not always been the success many readers know it to be. Moreover, Michaels reveals that the Carnegie medal had quite the "lackluster" and "disappointing" conception, as it was formed due to the "fact that their counterparts at the American Library Association already had the very successful and prestigious Newberry Medal" (p. 33-34). Coincidentally, Shackford (1977) investigates the eminence of the Newberry Medal and its winners. She compares what the reading tastes of children "*are* rather than what they *ought to be*" by conducting a series of interviews with both school and public librarians (p. 101; emphasis in original). Shackford's findings exert that there are certain characteristics that must be met in order to be found appealing by children readers, such as "a theme that is worth caring about" (p. 105). This discovery is one with very broad and notable implications to the world of children's literature, the awards that emerge from this body of work, and, more narrowly, my project.

As I mentioned previously, despite the overwhelming amount of data constructed around more well-known children's literature awards, very little critical research has been conducted into the young adult novel recipients of either the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award or the Schneider Family Book Award. In the one available investigation, Curwood (2013) proactively encourages the use of critical literacy when reading these specifically selected award-winning texts in order to "question the construction of normalcy and disability within young adult literature" (p. 25). Moreover, she emphasizes that these works are extremely important to

students as they feature main characters with a (dis)ability instead of containing supporting characters that “do not generally lend themselves as well to critical discourse analysis” (Curwood, p. 26).

Scholars have also comprised compendiums of titles and brief synopses of works that have won these literary honors housed among other, non-winners, that also contain portrayals of the (dis)abled experience (Dyches & Prater; Robertson, 1992; Vasa, 1991; Ward, 2002). Other than these detailed annotated bibliographies, the only other evidence of work into this particular area can be found in the form of short reviews of a year’s particular winner. Moreover, these assessments are always raving recommendations for potential readers. For example, Klipper (2011) includes, “While this award may not yet have a long history, you can count on the Schneider Family Book Award each year to point you and your teen patrons to wonderful books that you and they will want to read” (p. 7). This article and others like it could be much more enlightening if evidence of a critically informed analysis, such as the one conducted by Curwood (2013), could have been included to inform the readers of the literary merit of these novels and picturebooks alike. This addition is only one facet of a much larger study that I wish to bring to this expanding field of research. The present study builds on this body of work by analyzing, through the means of autoethnography and literary analysis, the Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award. Additionally, this research uses the theoretical lenses of social constructionism, particularly regarding the (dis)abled identity, critical literacy, and Nikolajeva’s Theory of Narrativity.

Theoretical Lenses

In many ways, my thesis explores the topic of identity and how an individual constructs his or her own vision of the self and the possible impacts the culture of (dis)ability may have on

this view of identity. To aid me in this exploration, I used a series of theoretical frameworks, which include social constructionism, critical literacy, and Nikolajeva's Theory of Narrativity. These frameworks are discussed at length below.

Social Constructionism

Specifically, I primarily took on a social constructionist stance in regards to my examination of identity. From this perspective, I formed my own opinions and potential theories on the self, particularly in regards to (dis)ability and its potential affects on identity. This revelation concerning identity is necessary, because "how one defines the nature of identity affects the way that one chooses to study it and the technique one uses the study it" (Lee and Anderson, 2009, p. 187). Moreover, in the context of my work, this theory also informs the social media model of (dis)ability, yet another theoretical framework that I weaved throughout the entirety of my work.

However, before delving into the intricacies of this secondary framework, I must first define social constructionism, as this lens is a way to look at identity in opposition to the commonly used essentialist view of identity. Lee and Anderson (2009) expose the paradigm shift that was the impetus for the creation of this dichotomy, which consists of both the essentialist and social constructionist views of identity, by sharing the following:

Thus the supposed grounding of one's identity is less about how and where you belong and more about how transitions across contexts in the here and now render identities as boundary objects that index salient kinds of identities through behavior over time. (p. 185).

From this perspective, identity is not a fixed concept; this unique notion explains that one's being is a "boundary object" and changes depending on one's position in time and space. This view

aligns with Hermans' (2006) theory of the dialogical self, as introduced in the previous chapter, the Literature Review.

A social constructionist view of the (dis)abled identity. To review, Hermans' (2006) theory stresses that the self and its many different ascribed identities are constantly in flux and participating in several "forms of dialogue: agreement, disagreement, negotiation, opposition, and conflict" (Hermans, p. 148). Lee and Anderson (2009) also bring forth evidence of other theorists and their work with this concept of identity when they include the following piece:

Identity is a fluid, socially constituted achievement that is multiply constructed across micro-social (individual) and macro-social (cultural/institutional timescales (Bhabha, 1990, 1994; Chuang, 2004; Grossber, 1996; Hall, 1989, 1990, 1996; Lemke, 2008; McCarthy & Moje, 2002; Nasir & Saze, 2003; Rampton, in press)" (p. 185-186).

Essentially, this concept of an animate, "fluid," and socially constructed identity led to the divided shift in perspective, bringing forth the social constructionist view of identity. As I continue the process of defining this particular view, it is necessary to state that these two views of identity, although often labeled as a dichotomy, which I have done above, are not in direct opposition. These two theoretical differences are "by no means airtight or even agreed on in some aspects" (Lee & Anderson, p. 186).

Despite having some similarities, the essentialist and social constructionist views of identity do possess many differences. For instance, as Peterson (2012), who cites Danziger (1997), provides, the two common themes of social constructionism are as follows: "an emphasis on the discursive formation of knowledge and the demystification of scientific knowledge" (p. 465-466). Additionally, these thematic elements are in direct opposition to the essentialist approach "which form an implicit ideological link between categories of actions (e.g., racial

label and language practices) and identity, without acknowledging the value-laden-ness of this connection (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004)” (Lee & Anderson, 2009, p. 186). To explain, a social constructionist view of identity really emphasizes the importance of discourse, which in turn highlights the fluidity of identity itself. This ever moving gaze directed upon the self is also prominent within the realm of (dis)ability studies. This correlation is beneficial, as the social constructivist framework somewhat disregards certain theories within the scientific and mathematical fields, which, at time, attempt to overthrow certain qualitative approaches such as my own involving an autoethnographic approach to identity and (dis)ability and the implementation of critical literacy. These methods will be discussed at large in Chapter Three.

Foregoing a possible discussion of methodology and focusing instead on the theoretical frameworks at hand, a social constructivist approach is an excellent framework to pursue within my work, as the social constructed view of (dis)ability, which is also known as the social media model of (dis)ability, focuses on the constant collaboration of the many attributes or abilities of an individual instead of honing in on just one. The opposing tendency usually involves evaluating an individual on the realization that a certain task or set of skills cannot be completed or brought to fruition. This characteristic of the social media model of (dis)ability and more are explored in the following section.

The social media model of (dis)ability. As previously discussed in the “Literature Review” portion of this chapter, the social media model of (dis)ability “denies that any particular attributes or functioning of individual bodies should be thought to constitute a 'problem' or 'disadvantage' apart from the social environment within which the individuals live” (Corker & Shakespeare, 2002, p. xii). This interpretation is helpful, as it elaborates upon the phenomenon I mentioned above—creating a “problem” or “disadvantage” from an individual’s unique set of

characteristics or habitual behaviors. However, within this definition, the origins of this problematizing process is unknown, but Puar (2009) reveals this information by stating the following: “Encounters with social, cultural, and capitalist infrastructures (literal, built, architectural, ideological, public policy—encounters where bodily capacity may be rendered inadequate or challenged) potentially render affective capacity, in its productive movement, exploitative and exploited” (p. 162). Essentially, countless external and internal forces, both overt and unknowing, are constantly shaping one’s identity. These forces may appear as individuals, constructions, or psychological emotions.

Oppositional devices. This subliminal propaganda of sorts seems inescapable, as “it [the body] is always already shaped by and bound to interface with prevailing notions of chance, risk, accident, luck, and probability, as well as with bodily limits—incapacity, disability, and debility” (Puar, 2009, p. 163). The social media model of (dis)ability attempts to change this grim outlook by acting as an “oppositional device” (Beckett & Campbell, 2015, p. 272). The creation of the social media model of (dis)ability as this kind of tool “provides a framework for describing practices of invention, collaboration, and resistance deployed by people against disciplining practices of subjectivation, to make themselves anew” (Beckett & Campbell, p. 272). Specifically, this framework provides us all with different forms of technology in the form of devices, new practices, and the gathering of bodies of all types.

Becket and Campbell also bring forth a list of other, more specific, “oppositional devices” that can be put to use in our culture, a state that still, at times, condemns (dis)ability to an extent. Some of these tools include but are not limited to the following: “allowing practices, programmes and rationalities to be identified as unjust;” “harnessing and orientating practices of resistance toward such programmes, procedures and rationalities;” “allowing establishment of a

social movement's vocabulary and delineation of what can be said if an enunciation is to be associated with a movement and boundaries that once crossed result in a statement losing meaning for, and possibly approval of, a movement;" and "facilitating analysis—allowing statements, policies and institutions to be evaluated" (p. 275).

The latter of these devices is the essential purpose of my research, as I analyze not "statements, policies, [or] institutions" but another social construct, children's literature and the role specific works play in shaping the culture of (dis)ability and also identity. Distinctly, I investigate the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award through several different methods. These varying procedures collectively permit me to understand my identity as a sibling of an individual with a (dis)ability and, on a much grander scale, (dis)ability's role in society. To perform this analysis, I first enact the use of another theoretical lens, critical literacy, which is specific to the literary nature of my work. This framework is discussed at length below.

Critical Literacy

Comprehensively, I use the theory of critical literacy to frame the larger portion of my research. I possess the traditional view of this theory, but I implement varying practices of its pedagogy in my work. To explain, I take the idea of critical literacy and refine the concept to examine specific features possessed by the characters in these award-winning young adult novels, my individualized background knowledge, interests, and resources. However, before I delve into the intricacies of this particular process, I must first define this somewhat broad literary term, by means of the wide range of media that can be analyzed. Luke (2004) defines critical literacy as the "use of the technologies of print and other mediums of communication to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rules systems, and practices governing the social fields of every life (A. Luke, 2004)" (p. 5). This definition parallels my own understanding of the

implementations of critical literacy and also my particular needs surrounding this project. In regards to the latter and similar to Luke's explanation, I use "print media," particularly award-winning young adult novels, to "analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rules systems, and practices" that preside over the view of (dis)ability in our present culture (p. 5).

Furthermore, critical literacy is focused on "social justice in marginalized and disenfranchised communities" (Luke, 2004, p. 5). These deprived groups can be excluded due to gender, sexuality, or other forms of difference. I focus on the latter and specifically address the issue of difference in terms of (dis)ability and its presence in the world of award-winning young adult literature. The tool of critical literacy is perfect for my research and its basis, because "critical literacy approaches view language, texts, and their discourse structures as principal means for representing and reshaping possible worlds" (Luke, p. 8-9). In this way, I use critical literacy to analyze texts and their contents, specifically the ten young adult novel winners of the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award and the way these works compare to my own lived experiences as an individual who is very close to the (dis)abled community.

Critically analyzing children's literature. Similarly, children's literature is an excellent platform to use in my work, I chose this specific type of media from the extensive selection available the researchers, because "from the transactional perspective, children's literature is seen as a "way of knowing"" (Serafini, 2003). Specifically, this medium is used to "help children make connections to the world around them, become acquainted with the language of stories, learn more about the characteristics of the natural and social world, and discover insights into their own personalities and identities (Short, 1999)" (Serafini). These particular characteristics of this sphere of the literary world perfectly align with the impetus and eventual goal of my research, to further my own understanding of (dis)ability and its impact on my life as a sibling of

an individual with a (dis)ability and then spread awareness of this possibility for comprehension with others like myself. Curwood (2013) reaffirms the potential of this medium by bringing forth the following:

In other words, critical literacy involves more than just reading print text, it also involves considering our own lived experiences and our context. Consequently, learning about social justice in the world and engaging in literary study can be a powerful way for youth to critically consider disability (p. 16).

In regards to my own personal experiences, the young adult novels in question have provided me with an outlet to gratify my need to comprehend and cope with my past and its both positive and negative entanglements with my brother and his (dis)ability. Curwood, who finds inspiration in the work of Freire and Macedo, again parallels my beliefs precisely when she shares, “Young adult literature can be a way to both read the world and read the word” (p. 16).

Readers are able to read the world, because, distinctly, every author has, at times, covert intentions placed within his or her work. Serafini (2003) sheds light on this premeditation by inserting the piece below:

From this [critical] perspective, texts are not neutral receptacles of information but cultural artifacts, created for specific purposes by people with political, cultural, and historical experiences; texts are social constructions that promote particular interest and versions of reality, and are sit for construction of plural and possibly conflicting meaning (O’Neill, 1993)” (p. 7).

These novels, in particular are not politically, culturally, or historically neutral, as they contain topics and characters that bring to life such relevant and oppressed coinciding realities.

(Dis)ability is the forefront of these texts, and this existence is the cause of their fame. Using critical literacy allowed me to fully grasp these works' connotations.

Using a critical stance. Nonetheless, as I mentioned above, I adopted the traditional view of critical literacy and followed a slightly different process and implemented instead a "critical stance" (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004, p. 52). To do this, I focused solely on the texts in question and their ideological structures. I first use my "background knowledge to understand the relationship between [my] ideas and the ideas present by the author of the text" (McLaughlin & DeVogd, p. 52). Specifically, I liken my own history to that featured in the novels; I recollect on my own personal recollections and find similarities between the real and the imagined. For instance, if I see an event or moment in the text, I reflect on my own lived experiences and determine if any memories exist that parallel with those featured in the award-winning works. The information is then cataloged as either a text-to-text-, text-to-world, or text-to-self connection. If a connection of one or more of these categories is found, the material under consideration is easily grasped and subsequently stored. This exercise is the product of Harvey & Goudvis (2007) and their work with elementary students in which the learners make connections in order to "construct meaning" (p. 92).

The Creation of Connections and Disconnections. Harvey and Goudvis' technique is beneficial to my project and my initial understanding of these texts, as "it is important that readers make connections because they are building understanding and engaging with the text in a way that brings the reader into a story beyond the surface level meaning of the words" (Jones & Clarke, 2007, p. 99). Despite these benefits, I want to entrench myself deeper within these texts and their constructed characters, happenings, and also ideologies. To attempt this feat, I also challenge aspects of the texts instead of focusing solely on connections. Jones and Clarke

discuss this process of “‘talking back’ to, or critiquing mainstream texts and asking critical questions about stereotypical representations and the construction of normalcy in texts” (p. 109-110). Whilst this process of making connections and disconnections may seem flippant or quite simple to an outsider in regards to mental stimuli and stress, the experience is actually not an idle one in the least. McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) elaborate upon this mentally strenuous task by asserting the following:

Reading from a critical stance requires both the ability and the deliberate inclination to think critically about—to analyze and evaluate—information sources (e.g., texts, media, lyrics, hypertext); meaningfully question their origin an purpose; and take action by representing alternative perspectives” (p. 53).

One must be committed to the goal at hand, remain aware constantly, and unafraid to share.

Although I do struggle with the apprehension to reveal such intimate details, I am conscious of the significance of critical literacy and my research, which I discuss at length below.

In the context of my work, the important and, at times, difficult task of creating “disconnections” is to challenge several aspects of the texts, including the use of the traditional or medical model of (dis)ability, stereotypical and overused behavioral characteristics of individuals with (dis)abilities, and oversimplified or convenient endings. Explicitly, Jones and Clarke (2007) once more speak to the need to discuss and analyze these disconnections whenever they may be present by inserting the following:

Through making disconnections we were able to use these texts as an entry point to a critical literacy practice that had the potential to promote the dismantling of some of the stereotypical representations of characters in books as well as stereotypes that govern social interactions among people in societies” (p. 109).

Simply put, a balance of sorts must be reached in order for preordained assumptions, if erroneous, to be overthrown. However, my connections and disconnections are simply “an entry point,” as I further enlarge upon my own experience with and within the culture of (dis)ability in minute and personal detail and issue forth provoking questions and claims concerning these critically acclaimed novels (Jones & Clarke, p. 109).

This insertion of an autoethnographic lens is useful when reading and subsequently critiquing these works, because, as Florio-Ruane (2001) describes using Fischer (1986) as a guide, ethnic autobiography, while critically reading texts, is “a powerful text for such reading because it is about the construction of identity in and through contact with other like and different from oneself” (p. 13). My stories enhance the differences and likenesses that exist between my brother and myself. What’s more, my autobiography that ventures into the world of (dis)ability may also aid others, specifically educators and their students, in a journey much like my own.

However, to construct these autobiographical vignettes to share with others in the field of education and beyond, I first had to read the ten young adult novel winners of the Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award. This process was instrumental in the success of this research. Delving into these works allowed me to recollect on my own experiences while simultaneously dissecting the experiences of the characters within these texts. In regards to the latter, I implemented Nikolajeva’s Theory of Narrativity to guide me through my many readings of these works and the subsequent investigation that occurred.

Nikolajeva’s Theory of Narrativity

Maria Nikolajeva’s Narrative Theory, as featured in her much larger work *Aesthetic Approaches to Children’s Literature* (2005), aides and allows me to focus on the unique way that

an author of a particular fictional work constructs the ideal and implied readers and authors in order to create an interlocking and dependent chain of communication. Nikolajeva describes this theory as a collection of “accurate tools for analyzing the way stories are constructed, proceeding from surface structures to deeper ones” (p. 118). Moreover, she includes that the essence of narrative theory is “not the narrative as such, but narrativity, the set of properties characterizing narrative” (Nikolajeva, p. 118).

Thus, using this theoretical framework as a guide for a portion of my research, I do not focus on the narrative structure as a whole. Although Nikolajeva’s Theory of Narrativity “offers us a number of valuable tools for assessing narrativity” by way of characterization, perspective, the art of narration, and temporal structure, I have chosen to focus on the action of narration, how and why the narrative was constructed involving the author, reader, and all of the narrative structure’s many other components (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 118). These parts include the author, both real and implied or ideal, the reader, both real and implied or ideal, the narrator, and the narratee. Below, I expound upon each of these entities individually and collectively and their impact on my work as a whole, beginning with the unification of these elements—the chain of communication.

The chain of communication. The real and implied or ideal authors and readers come together, along with the narrator and the narratee, to form a direct line of transference, the chain of communication. The chain of communication occurs during the act of narration, and “most scholars of contemporary narrative theory agree that all narratives are narrated, have a narrator, even though the narrator can be covert” (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 172). Therefore, each narrative has

a chain of communication. A depiction of this chain can be found below, as Figure 1.

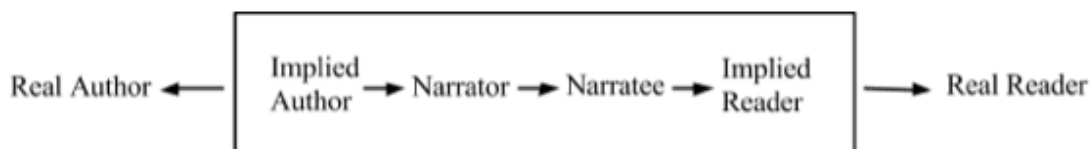


Figure 1. The Chain of Communication.

Although, to understand the chain as a whole, one must also be able to interpret its individual, correlating pieces, as I do in the subsequent paragraphs.

Author. The author, the first segment of the chain of communication, is one of, if not the, most straightforward concepts of the chain. Simply put, an author’s identity is the easiest knowledge to ascertain. One can do so by simply looking anywhere within a work of literature. The author’s name can usually be seen in very large and bold font on the front cover and on the title page, along with the title and publication information, with a similar, deliberate use of font. Additionally, the author’s name can also be found along the spine of a work and, frequently, at the upper right or left hand margins of the book’s pages.

After one obtains the most critical information regarding an author, his or her name, one usually wants to know more about this individual—to learn of his or her life, including current residence, past achievements, or previously written texts. This supplementary information, or “paratext,” can be found, of course, with the use of a computer, but an easier option is available within the actual book itself (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 2) Nikolajeva defines paratext as, “information about authors inside the books, on the back cover or the flap: where they live, what other books they have written, what awards they have received, and so on” (p. 2). This information can assist me in my understanding of these particular author’s identities, as their ideologies inadvertently affect the identities, both (dis)abled and not, of their characters. These varying aspects of the

author of a work is important to identify, as revealed in the following “Real Author” and “Implied or Ideal Author” sections.

Real author. Nikolajeva (2005) asserts, “flesh-and-blood authors are only important insofar as they affect the creation of the text, through fact of their lives, and their beliefs and ideologies” (p. 172). Essentially, narrative theory somewhat disregards the superficial elements of an author. This particular theoretical lens is not primarily concerned with the sex, birth, death, or any other basic aspect of an author’s life, but these characteristics can and do affect the author’s beliefs. Particular characteristics, although externally, are internally ingrained within oneself. The impact of these internalizations can be seen in many ways throughout certain texts but will not be addressed in this context.

Implied or ideal author. In opposition to the real author of a text, a human being, the concept of an implied or ideal author is purely subjective and abstract. To explain, Nikolajeva (2005) states, “readers may have an image of the author inscribed in the text” (p. 172). As one reads a work, he or she, whether consciously or not, forms a picture of the author in one’s mind. Most often, the author is confused with the narrator, a phenomenon that is distinctive to each reader. This confusion stresses the importance of the bond that is hopefully formed between the reader and the text, as the reader often associates him or herself with the main character who is, at times, the narrator and the individual whom we see the story through his or her eyes. Nikolajeva contends this extremely personal connection by including that the implied or ideal author is simply about the “reader’s relationship to the reading experience” (p. 172). In many ways, including the creation the implied reader, the reader plays the most important role in the chain of communication, a crucial part, which I explicate upon below.

Reader. Nikolajeva (2005) explains, “The contemporary children’s and adolescent novel tends to put its implied readers into active subject positions” (p. 193). Readers now have power; these “active subjects” now possess the agency to determine and voice their own interpretations, which I do in the subsequent sections (Nikolajeva, p. 193). In this way, the reader is the most relevant piece of the literary world, as readers, or the receivers of text, are one of the primary reasons that books are written. Books are fabricated to be read, correct? Even the front cover illustrations are there for the reader, to entice him or her, just as an award-winning emblem does. Then, after choosing a book of one’s liking, the reader actually enters into the text through his or her own free will, flips open the cover, and possibly skims through a few pages to discover what awaits him or her. On these pages lay the actual story, the labored opus of the author. Most importantly, in twenty-first century literacy research, readers have become something much more than simple receivers.

Real reader. I am the real reader in this instance, as I have actually read and subsequently analyzed the ten novels in question. However, this concept of the real reader changes within a certain context. As an individual chooses to partake in a book’s contents, he or she becomes the real reader. The real reader cannot be just one person, as the real author shall be. More than one person reads a novel that is published and later placed on the shelves for purchase. This is the purpose of literature, as it is created by the author to be distributed and also loved. Although, the author may actually have a vision of his or her potential reader while this construction is occurring. This hope comes in the form of the implied or ideal reader.

Implied or ideal reader. Specifically, this aspect of a reader is “the real author’s idea of their audience as inscribed in the text. In other words, the implied reader is an abstract receiver assumed to have the capacity to assess the text” (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 253). Acting as a mirrored

reflection of the implied or ideal author, this concept is, too, highly theoretical, difficult to discern, and personal. To explain, one would think that the implied or ideal reader could essentially be revealed in the dedication or author's statement of the work in question, as the author is the one who determines who holds of this title. However, it is important to delineate the implied or ideal reader from these opening inscriptions, as "the author's statement and the implied reader found in the text are not necessarily identical" (Nikolajeva, p. 247).

With this lack of specificity, I know that I cannot rely on these dedications to establish the ideal or implied reader. To do this, I use Nikolajeva's concept of the interpretive community, which "describes an implied audience that is supposed to have a somewhat common background concerning age, education, life experience, reading habits, and so on" (2005, p. 255). This theory infers that, like the real reader, there cannot be just one implied or ideal reader. An interpretive community, too, changes with the circumstances. Moreover, there is not predetermined interpretive community. Although, as listed above in the excerpt, there are certain similarities that must exist amongst the audience to create an interpretive community. To obtain the identity of these novels' interpretative communities, I first engage in the process of introspection and realize that I, myself, could belong to many of endless interpretive communities for these novels. Some examples are as follows: siblings of those with a (dis)ability, an adult reader of young adult novels, and a children's literature scholar and researcher. Memberships to these communities and more allow me to dissect these novels and their narratives' chain of communication, particularly the entities of narrator and narratee.

Narrator. To recognize the narrator is a simple task, much like the deduction of the identity of the real reader or the real author. Usually, if the text in question only has one narrator, an individual must read the first few pages of text to discover the character or omniscient being

who tells the story in question. As mentioned above, during this task of recognition and while reading a work, many become quite adamant that the author actually has the narrative agency, particularly when a third-person narrator exists. However, as revealed in the “Chain of Communication” segment of this chapter, there is always a narrator within any work of literature. This existence is beneficial to remember as “it is problematic to hold author responsible for what might be deliberately provoking statements in the text” (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 172). This distinction serves many purposes, most of which alleviate any potential confusion of the reader and help understand any underlying, subtle ideologies that may be present within a work. For example, “the views expressed by a narrator do not necessarily have to coincide with those of either the real or the implied author, especially, as happens in children’s fiction, when the narrator is a child” (Nikolajeva, p. 173). This knowledge is beneficial in this research, as all of the novels have children, adolescents, or young adults as their narrators. However, the narratees of these works are not as homogeneous.

Narratee. The concept of the narratee is slightly more complicated than that of the narrator, but still extremely helpful for this type of work, for the following reason:

Since, as repeatedly stated, authors of children’s books are adults while the recipients are children, the balance is unequal. An adult author has more experience than the child recipient; an adult’s vocabulary is normally larger and their cognitive level higher.

Authors can hardly help addressing the adult co-reader alongside the child, which means that the right-hand part of the chain is in fact duplicated (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 262).

In this way, the “right-hand part of the chain,” like the implied or ideal author and readers, is also a subjective fabrication (Nikolajeva, p. 262). Contrastingly though, the author does have more agency in this regard, as he or she may insert aspects of the text for many types of readers. These

insertions are seen in the humor, vocabulary, or plot constructions of certain picturebooks, intermediate chapter books, and young adult novels. The latter of which I proceed to examine.

These three lenses, social constructionism, critical literacy, and Nikolajeva's Theory of Narrativity, collectively inform my unit of study and help to answer my two research questions, "What themes emerge in a content analysis of the young adult novel winners, from 2000 to 2014, of the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award? How do these themes relate to my lived experiences, connections, and disconnections with the texts?" and "What themes emerge in the literary analysis of the young adult titles that have won the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award and also feature sibling narrators?" Separately, each theoretical lens plays its own unique role in answering these questions. To explain, in order to answer Research Question One, the theory of social constructionism and its view of (dis)ability allow me to look at the thematic ways (dis)ability is portrayed within the ten novels, in regards to the identity of and the agency had by the (dis)abled characters featured. While investigating these award-winning texts and discovering the role (dis)ability plays within these works, critical literacy acts a guide to simultaneously question these portrayals and record my own connections and disconnections. In regards to Research Question Two, Nikolajeva's Theory of Narrativity acts a means to implement a literary analysis on two specific works that feature sibling narrators. With this specific theoretical framework, I look at a smaller set of texts to investigate their narrative structure, which serves as a way to reveal authorial ideologies and subtle power dynamics that are involved in the creation and retrieval of the narrative.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Nikolejeva (2005) asserts the importance of methodology by first explaining the limitations of theory. She explains that relying solely on a theory is much “like a bicycle with square wheels: a daring idea, but not of much use” (p. 270). Although Nikolajeva is referencing the lone use of theory when analyzing literary texts, the means by which I implement the bulk of my research, I still find her metaphor to be quite relevant, as one’s methodology informs the readers of “how data become results in order to trust the author’s claims” (Smagorinsky, 2008, p. 393). In this way, the inclusion of a detailed methods section is integral to the success of any research project.

In this chapter, entitled “Methodology,” I describe the process of completing the entirety my research, from inception to commencement. This collective procedure has taken me over seven months time to finish. Additionally, I include what initial research interests and projects led me to pursue this particular topic. In Chapter Three, I also highlight the specific methods, autoethnography and literary analysis, in which I used to carry out this study. These methods were excellent to use, as they perfectly align the emotional and scholarly needs of my study in order to answer my two central research questions. Additionally, autoethnography and literary analysis presented me with guidelines to follow as I collected, analyzed, and subsequently recorded my data and subsequent findings. Again, these various steps are discussed in detail below.

The Method of Auto-Analysis: A Combination of Autoethnography and Literary Analysis

Autoethnography: Affordances and Limitations

To begin, autoethnography, according to Ellis, Adams, & Bochner (2011) who collectively cite Ellis (2004) and Holman Jones (2005), is “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understanding cultural experience (ethno)” (p. 274). As previously mentioned, I began this research project in order to gain an understanding of my “personal experience” as a sibling of a (dis)abled, specifically autistic, individual in correspondence to a greater, more holistic, “cultural experience” of all siblings or family members of those with mental (dis)abilities. In an attempt to do so, through this work, I partake in the two steps that comprise the process of autoethnography. I first “retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by being a part of a culture and/or possessing a particular cultural identity,” and I then “analyze these experiences” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 276).

The intricacies of my particular procedure include reading the texts multiple times while searching for text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-world connections (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Then, I take my analysis a step further by deepening my comprehension and collecting my own disconnections, in contrast to the previous connections gathered (Jones & Clarke, 2007). These personal connections and disconnections, which surface in the form of autobiographical vignettes, act to highlight the autoethnographic nature of my work. Johnson (2012) enacts a similar process, as she investigates the method of self-study by keeping a “learning journal” and “creating sketches and brainstorming ideas in an actual notebook of how to visually represent

learning” (p. 89). Through this procedure, Johnson, too, accesses prior knowledge in order to fully comprehend new or previously misunderstood concepts, as I do in the autoethnographic portion of my study.

Johnson (2012) also addresses the dichotomy that exists between qualitative and quantitative research paradigms and the reputations that go along with each. Specifically, many scholars, even in the field of qualitative research, believe that autoethnography is “too artful and not scientific, or too scientific and not sufficiently artful,” which I see to be a contradiction within itself (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 283). Perhaps, these naysayers do so out of hesitation or even fear, as other criticisms have arisen over autoethnography’s reliability, validity, and generalizability as well. However, when conducting my own research, in regards to reliability, I try to avoid such possible denunciations in my own work by presenting detailed accounts of my process and keeping records of all of my data collection and analysis processes.

Unfortunately, I cannot say that ensuring validity is as procedural as the aforementioned tasks of being organized and responsible. This difficulty is due to the nature of autoethnography, as, “for autoethnographers, validity means that a work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possibly, a feeling that what has been represented could be true” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 282). As I have repeatedly stated, this project was a labor of love, to use an old idiom, and one that I am unsure that I would not have continued if it wasn’t for the presence of the overwhelming sense of traditional generalizability that I believe can be found within my work. To explain, I foresee that many educators and family members of a (dis)abled individual or individuals could benefit from my research. They can relate to my experiences, because they have, too, lived through times such as these or know that their students are currently going through similar life events. These moments,

or, as I refer to them, connections, are not only my own, as I have seen them uploaded onto blogs, online chat rooms, and forums dedicated to siblings like me or mothers, fathers, grandmothers, and so on. Nonetheless, I have also tried to incorporate and “illuminate (general) unfamiliar cultural processes (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis & Ellingson, 2000)” through my text connections and insertions of my own personal vignettes to ensure qualitative generalizability (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 283).

As revealed earlier, autoethnography is often considered to be artful or even self-absorbed. I, too, worried about the latter label, as I include so much of myself and my thoughts, memories, and aspirations within the majority of my work. Moreover, the term “navel-gazing” even appears throughout many pieces written on this method. However, as Mitchell and Weber (2005) assert, it is important to realize that “failing to grasp that looking inward can lead to a more intelligent and useful *outward gaze* is to seriously misunderstand the method and potential of the narrative and autobiographical forms of inquiry” (p. 4, emphasis in original). Although, I must admit that my “outward gaze” may also have, in the eyes of some readers, ethical implications.

The ethics I refer to above stem from the inclusion of my brother, which I do so by name, and his life, actions, and, at times, thoughts. Throughout my work, I analyze him, in addition to myself, in order to further my own understanding of him and his (dis)ability. I rarely contemplate the benefits this project may have for him—only for myself and other siblings and family members. This consideration is lacking in my piece. However, I hope to right this, what I see as a, wrong, by sharing what I can about my work verbally with my brother. I am unsure if he will fully grasp what I relay to him, but I do believe that this act will mean a lot to him and also my parents. In an attempt to avoid any additional ethical concerns, I intend to further share

my work with my parents, as their family and parenting styles are included in many instances throughout this research. This revelation of my work might be painful for both parties, my parents and myself, but, ultimately, I think it will be beneficial for our relationship and our family as a whole, which is one of the outcomes I so desperately wanted when beginning this project.

Literary Analysis: Affordances and Limitations

Literary analysis is also a multifaceted method, which involves many detailed steps. Biscontini (2015) explains that a literary analysis is “a writer’s argument for how an aspect of a work of literature should be interpreted. Such an analysis focuses on a specific attribute of a work rather than the work as a whole.” Using this extremely useful definition as a guide, I subsequently implement this method according to my theoretical lens of Nikolajeva’s (2005) Theory of Narrativity. I embark on this portion of my research by first analyzing the ten young adult novel winners of the Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award collectively. Following this initial investigation, I constricted my examination to only include two novels, *Tru Confessions* by Janet Tashjian (2007) and *A Small White Scar* by K. A. Nuzum (2006). Furthermore, I only look at certain narrative aspects found within these works. These pieces of the chain of communication were introduced and defined in Chapter Two.

While the limitations of literary analysis as a method are not as prevalent as autoethnography’s restrictions, pitfalls do exist. These restraints pertain to the endless possibilities had for the method of literary analysis and my project as a whole. For example, I only analyzed two books out of all of the ten young adult novels winners of the Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award. My scope could be extended much wider to possibly include all of the young adults novels that have received this award, the picturebook winners of this award,

other award-winning young adult novels that contain (dis)ability, or even novels concerning (dis)ability that are not as well known. I could also use another form of analysis such a discourse analysis or perhaps even use a different theoretical lens. The list of these alternatives is seemingly endless. However, one aspect of this research—the sole participant—remains constant.

The Participant: An Individual and an Interest

As my thesis work contains the methodology of autoethnography and, thus, focuses intensely on identity as a social construction, it is necessary to include many personal characteristics, including my own positionality regarding the topic of (dis)ability and my social and educational background. The publication of these traits will inform the reader as to why I made many of my decisions and chose to pursue these two research methods. To begin, the methods detailed above are significant to my research, as they perfectly intertwine to meet the needs of my project. Autoethnography and literary analysis also represent two loves—or rather passions—both academic and personal of mine. To explain, I have always been drawn toward the written word. In fact, this desire to read and learn from texts led me to pursue an undergraduate degree in English at a large university in the southeastern portion of the United States. Later, after graduating my Bachelors degree, I followed my interests into the field of education, specifically reading and the use of children’s literature in the classroom, and I applied to a Masters of Education program at the same university, where I later was accepted and find myself currently.

Upon enrolling in this degree program, I soon found it evident that I had to choose a specified research interest within the realm of reading, writing, children’s literature, or digital literacies to follow in order to delineate myself as a future scholar and also to possess material

for the many assignments that were to come. At first, I was stumped, for lack of a better word; I had no idea where to turn, and, as each day passed, the amount of scholars, texts, and theories I was to already know increased. With the outlook of my academic career uncertain, I turned to my personal life for inspiration. As revealed earlier, I am very close to and have a very special bond with my brother, Spencer, who is autistic. I have always had this desire to understand him, to see the world the ways that he sees it, to emerge myself in his life, his culture. This curiosity of sorts led me to first investigate several literary awards, specifically children's literature accolades, that applaud the portrayal of the (dis)abled community.

Past Research: Looking into the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award

For projects assigned in both critical pedagogies and multicultural children's literature courses during my first semester of graduate work, I began an investigation of the (dis)abled community and a literary examination of picturebooks that had received the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award. This prestigious title is given by the Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities, or DADD, of the Council for all Children (2012) in collaboration with the Special Needs Project, a conglomerate that prides itself to be comprised of "persons working with children, youth and adults with Autism, Intellectual Disabilities, and other Developmental Disabilities" (Council for Exceptional Children-DADD). This particular decoration was "initiated in 2000 to recognize authors, illustrators and publishers of high quality fictional and biographical children, intermediate, and young adult books that appropriately portray individuals with developmental disabilities" and has since presented an award every other year (Council for Exceptional Children-DADD). Furthering my research of (dis)ability during a course on international children's literature while continually looking to learn more of my brother's own (dis)ability, I then ventured to examine the picturebook winners of a similar

children's literature award, the Schneider Family Book Award, through the use of literary analysis. I believe this previously accomplished research inspired and also informs my current work. I am constantly building and expanding upon this initial research in order to meet my eventual goal, which I included above. To explain this connection, I reveal the correlations that exist between the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award and the Schneider Family Book Award. The latter prize is a part of a set of annual children's literature awards organized by the American Library Association that is given annually to three authors, one for the following age groups and grade levels: birth through grade school (ages 0 to 10), middle school (ages 11 through 12), and teens (ages 13 to 18). This award honors authors and illustrators who include "realistic protagonists and major secondary characters with disabilities" and "portray a disability as part of a person's full life, not something to be pitied or overcome" (McMillen, 2007, p. 7). With these purposes evident, the similarities between the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award and the Schneider Family Book Award are outstanding.

Most recently, I had to choose the perfect proposal for my thesis work, and I immediately knew which avenue to pursue. I wanted to expand further my work in the realm of (dis)ability studies. However, for work as important as this, I knew I wanted to finally achieve that connection with the literature, and, subsequently, my brother, that I had been seeking and earlier lacking. This need inspired my decision to select the young adult novel winners of the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award in hopes of achieving a more personal feel to this project, as I hypothesized that I, in addition to my brother, were both closer in age to the target audience and possibly the narrators of these novels.

Moreover, I knew that the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award was not far removed from the (dis)abled community and individual characters featured in the texts, as many members

of the DADD work with the (dis)abled community on a daily basis as professionals highly skilled in their level of expertise regarding intellectual and mental (dis)abilities including autism and even parents of children with developmental disabilities (Council for Exceptional Children-DADD). Lastly, as I divulged in the previous paragraph, The Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award focuses on works that include “autism, intellectual disabilities, and other developmental disabilities,” the first of which is the sphere of (dis)ability of which I am so interested, as this is my brother’s own diagnosis (Council for Exceptional Children-DADD). Moreover, his diagnosis has shaped my own life and identity.

Data Collection and Selection: Charts, Copies, and Contemplation

Featured Texts

The ten young adult novel winners of the Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award, the year in which each work was awarded the title, and the other significant facts concerning the plot of each work is included in the chart below, as Table 1:

Table 1. The Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award Young Adult Novel Winners.

Title of Work and Author	Year Awarded	Brief Plot Synopsis
<i>Tru Confessions</i> by Janet Tashjian	2000	Trudy Walker, or Tru, only has two wishes in this world: to have her own television show and to cure her (dis)abled twin brother, Eddie. Told through an electronic diary format, this work features Tru’s attempt to accomplish both of these dreams.

Title of Work and Author	Year Awarded	Brief Plot Synopsis
<i>Me and Rupert Goody</i> by Barbara O'Connor	2002	To avoid the chaos of her sibling-filled home, Jennalee spends all of her time with Uncle Beau at his general store. Things are calm and predictable until Rupert Goody, Uncle Beau's previously unknown (dis)abled son, shows up. In this novel, Jennalee must learn to grapple with Rupert's arrival amongst other twists and turns along the way.
<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> by Mark Haddon	2004	Beginning with an unusual crime, the murder of a neighbor's dog named Wellington, mentally (dis)abled Christopher Boone's self-narrated story seeks to find all the things in Christopher's life that is unknown to him: others' emotions, the reasons behind his mother's mysterious death, and his future.
<i>So B. It</i> by Sarah Weeks	2006	Twelve-year-old Heidi So B. It leaves the familiar surroundings of her home, including her (dis)abled mother and agoraphobic neighbor, Bernadette, to travel across the country to finally learn of her family's tumultuous history.

Title of Work and Author	Year Awarded	Brief Plot Synopsis
<i>A Small White Scar</i> by K. A. Nuzum	2008	Will has always wished to be the first-place winner of the La Junta Rodeo. However, in order to gain this prestigious title, he must leave behind everything he knows: his ranch, his father, and his (dis)abled twin brother, Denny, whom he is told that he must always look after.
<i>The London Eye Mystery</i> by Siobhan Dowd	2010	Ted, the (dis)abled narrator of this tale and his sister, Kat, are on a mission to locate their cousin, Salim, who strangely disappeared after boarding the famed London Eye.
<i>Waiting for No One</i> by Beverly Brenna	2012	Taylor Jane Simon is a typical eighteen-year-old girl who wishes for freedom and space away from her overbearing mother. However, Taylor also has Asperger's Syndrome, which complicates her wish for independence, as she details in her electronic diary of which the reader is privy.
<i>Mockingbird</i> by Kathryn Erskine	2012	Caitlin, the narrator of this novel, who also has Asperger's Syndrome, is forced to deal with the sudden death of her brother, Devon, who is killed during a school shooting. Her life is also filled with other challenges such as making new friends, overcoming bullying, and simply making it to middle school.

Title of Work and Author	Year Awarded	Brief Plot Synopsis
<i>Memoirs of an Imaginary Friend</i> by Matthew Dicks	2014	Budo is Max's imaginary friend. Luckily for Budo, he has been around for five years, which is extremely long for an imaginary friend. His longevity is possibly due to Max's (dis)ability. However, Budo's existence is put into question, as Max must become more independent in order to save his own life.
<i>Remember Dippy</i> by Shirley Reva Veronica	2014	Johnny's summer plans are immediately turned upside down when he learns that he must spend his vacation taking care of his (dis)abled cousin, Remember. Johnny soon discovers that he will not be bored with this task, as he and Remember experience a number of interesting and surprising adventures together.

As revealed in this chart, these texts are very different in nature, in regards to plot, characters, and narrative approach. However, they also have many commonalities that will be later revealed in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis.

Autoethnography: Discovering Connections and Disconnections

To learn more about the texts in question, I first located all ten of the young adult novel winners of the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award. These texts were either found in my own public library, my university's curriculum materials library, or shipped in from other libraries located in the northern portion of my state. While waiting several months to obtain all of these texts, I proceeded to read each novel once it arrived. During my first reading of every work, I

recorded my initial reactions onto color coordinated sticky notes. These reactions were completely spontaneous and related to my previously acquired knowledge or experience, which is also known as schema. I categorized my spontaneous responses as “connections,” or the “background knowledge we bring to our reading [which] colors every aspect of our learning and understanding (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 92). These connections also allowed me to take my analysis one step further and “acknowledge, question, challenge, and critique” the ten texts instead of automatically “believing in their authority” and create my own disconnections (Jones & Clarke, 2007, p. 100).

The connections fit into the following text categories:

- Text-to-Text Connection – “comparing characters, their personalities, their actions, story events, plot lines, lessons, themes, messages in the stories, the treatment of common themes by different authors, and different versions of familiar stories and finding common themes, writing styles, or perspectives in the work of a single author” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 96-97).
- Text-to-Self Connection – “thoughts and ideas that are close to the reader’s own experience” (Harvey & Goudvis, p. 93).
- Text-to-World Connection – “background knowledge about a topic... and to larger world [issues]” (Harvey & Goudvis, p. 100-101).

Text-to-Text Connections were placed onto yellow sticky notes, Text-to-Self Connections were written on pink sticky notes, and Text-to-World Connections were scribed onto green sticky notes. This system of color coordination used with the aforementioned connections stimulated me visually and easily kept me aware of the frequency of the use of each and all three colors or connection. Disconnections were then scribed into a Google Document, ensuring security, as this

document is housed within my own personal, password protected Google account and shared only with my advisor and one member of my committee.

After reading all of the texts and responding to each using my system of making connections and disconnections, I cataloged these connections and disconnections, along with excerpts of the text from which I had the interaction with, on both a digital and paper spreadsheet for each novel. The paper copy was created with simple white, unlined paper and permanent marker and housed all of the sticky notes that I had previously used. The permanent marker was used to create headings for each spreadsheet which include the title of the novel, the author, year awarded, and rows that separate the sticky notes by connection in order to keep my data organized and neat. Each of these hard copies are now inside a manila two-pronged folder which is also labeled with permanent marker to include the book's citation information using the American Psychology Association's format and the year the text received the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award. The folders can be found in a secure, yet easy to access, location in my home. A photo of this organizational system, both the paper copy and the folder, is included in Appendix A. The digital copies of these spreadsheets were created as Google Documents within a once private folder that has now been shared with my advisor and another member of my thesis committee. These digital spreadsheets include the following information: title of book, author's name, year awarded, text excerpt, page number on which the excerpt can be located, and text connection or disconnection. I have included a screenshot of a spreadsheet for *Tru Confessions* by Janet Tashjian (2007) for reference in Appendix B.

Literary Analysis

The latter half of my project involved once again reading two works in particular, *A Small White Scar* by K. A. Nuzum and *Tru Confessions* by Janet Tashjian, and conducting an in-

depth literary analysis of each. I chose these two novels, because I felt as though they truly portrayed a lived experience similar to my own. To explain, they both had a sibling as the narrator. As I read these novels for a second time, I took my own notes in regards to each element of Nikolajeva's Theory of Narrativity, specifically the chain of communication, that existed within these texts. However, I could not record these findings until I first immersed myself within Nikolajeva's work and literature. I did this by re-reading her text, *Aesthetic Approaches to Children's Literature* (2005), repeatedly and recording notes on her work, which includes examples from other renowned novels and picturebooks. Nikolajeva's Theory of Narrativity informed my work by providing the concept of the chain of communication and all of its many interconnected pieces. This theory is described in Chapter Two. After becoming immersed in the Theory of Narrativity, I then read the novels once more and recorded my preliminary findings. These notes have also been recorded digitally in a shared Google Document.

Additionally, I documented the lives of the real authors of *Tru Confessions* and *A Small White Scar* and recorded his or her name, where he or she lived, and his or her relationship to the (dis)abled community, if one exists. This information was obtained from the author's personal website or one created through their publishing company or interviews with the media, compiled, and saved as a digital spreadsheet, allowing for quick and secure access during the entire research process. A screenshot has been taken of this spreadsheet and is featured in Appendix C. This entire operation permitted me to begin thinking of the meaning and implementation of paratext, another aspect of Nikolajeva's Theory of Narrativity that I include in my work.

Data Analysis: Connections, Categories, and Coding

Autoethnography; Connections and Disconnections

When both of the separate systems of organization for my text connections had taken place, which I detailed above, I began sorting these categories into refined themes. This process took much contemplation and reviewing of both the digital and print copies of the connections. I carried out this refinement repeatedly until I had determined four main themes alongside other pertinent plot features: “Behavior of (Dis)abled Individual,” “Relating to Others Non-(Dis)abled Individuals,” “Outsiders’ Sentiments and Behaviors,” and “Siblings/Other Family Members’ Sentiments and Behavior.”

Each theme then includes varying intricacies, or sub-categories, of each. These themes, sub-categories, and their definitions are as follows:

- Behavior of (Dis)abled Individual – Any action of the (dis)abled individual, including those that I do and do not find similar to my brothers’ behavior
 - Positive Occurrence – An action of the (dis)abled individual that resulted in a positive outcome
 - Negative Occurrence – An action of the (dis)abled individual that resulted in a negative outcome
- Relating to Others, Non-(Dis)abled Individuals – Any instances in which the (dis)abled individual attempts to relate him or herself to non-(dis)abled individuals; the (dis)abled character intends to prove that they are the same as others or just a little different.
 - Positive Occurrence – An instance of identification that resulted in a positive outcome

- Negative Occurrence – An instance of identification that resulted in a negative outcome
- Siblings and Other Family Members’ Sentiments and Behaviors – any family members’ feelings or actions towards the (dis)abled individuals; includes but is not limited to acceptance, anger and resentment, care and love, misunderstanding, and teasing
 - Positive Occurrence – Feelings or actions displayed by a sibling or other family member that had a positive result; these include care or love, hope, and self discovery or acceptance
 - Negative Occurrence – Feelings or actions displayed by a sibling or other family member that had a negative result; these include teasing or name calling, jealousy, misunderstanding, guilt, anger, and anxiety or fear
- Outsiders’ Sentiments and Behaviors – any non-family members or friends’ actions toward (dis)abled characters; includes but is not limited to name-calling and hasty judgment
 - Positive Occurrence – Feelings or actions displayed by an “outsider” that had a positive result; these include but are not limited to the obtainment of a friend.
 - Negative Occurrence – Feelings or actions displayed by an “outsider” that had a negative result; these include but are not limited to the judgment of parents, medical model labeling or name calling in the form of giving a diagnosis, and bullying.

I then tabulated two of these themes, “Siblings and Other Family Members’ Sentiments and Behaviors” and “Outsiders’ Sentiments and Behaviors,” according to their positivity or negativity. To explain, I calculated the occurrence of one particular theme throughout the ten

novels. Next, I divided the total appearances according to their sub-category or positive or negative occurrences. I partook in this process for both of these themes. Lastly, I created charts to represent the differences that exist between these two subcategories of each theme. To clarify, each theme has its own chart including this information. These charts are included below, as Tables 2 and 3. Table 2 includes the number of occurrences of the theme “Siblings and Other Family Members’ Sentiments and Behaviors” and if the happening was positive or negative. Table 3 includes the number of occurrences of this “Outsiders Sentiments and Behaviors” and if the happening was positive or negative.

Table 2. The Theme of “Siblings and Other Family Members’ Sentiments and Behaviors”

Event Occurrence	Negative	Positive
1	Teasing/Name Calling	
1	Overcompensation/Acting as a Super Sibling (Subjective as to Negativity)	
1	Jealousy	
1		Care/Love
1		Hope
1		Self Discovery/Acceptance
2	Misunderstanding	
2	Guilt	
2	Anger	
4	Anxiety/ Fear	

Table 3. The Theme of “Outsiders’ Sentiments and Behaviors”

Event Occurrence	Negative	Positive	
1	Judgment of Parents		
2	Medical Model Labeling/Giving a Diagnosis		
6	Bullying		
6		The Obtainment of a Friend	

After creating these charts, I also compiled the occurrence of each sub-category of each of these themes to represent a percentage of the total number of happenings. These percentages provided me with useful numerical data that helped to further my understanding of the (dis)abled experience that many of these characters are subject to throughout the entirety of the novel and the disparity that exists between the negative and positive events that are featured in the texts.

Alongside these themes, I also identified several plot features. I categorize plot features as any reoccurring pattern of the story or aspect of the text that occurs within two or more of the novels. The selection of two or more occurrences may seem like a small sample set, but there are only ten novels collectively that can be considered young adult novel winners of the Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award. The plot features that I discovered within these works are as follows:

- The Metamorphosis or Maturation of Non-(Dis)abled Character – The non-(dis)abled character featured in the text experiences a great change in thought regarding the (dis)abled community and the events surrounding this culture.

- Conflict that Brings Individuals Together – Friction in the plot occurs, and the characters of the novel must come together to end this particular dispute.
- Educational Setting – A majority of the plot takes place within an educational building or another location of learning.
- Friendships with Older Individuals – The (dis)abled character in the novel becomes friends with much older members of his or her community.
- Use of the Mystery Genre – An element of mystery is included in the plot, and the characters of the novels must solve this puzzle of sorts.
- Meta-Physicality – The novel is situated as a text created by the narrator, either as a novel itself or a diary, hand-written or digital.

These textual features are crucial to understanding these works individually and also the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award as a whole, as these conventions assert that certain features of fictional works may determine their success and acclaim. Concurrently, I also created a detailed chart to connect the themes and plot features listed above and also the narrators of each text to aid in the analysis of each novel. This particular form of organization also helped me to deduce final conclusions, as the chart allowed me to look at the bigger picture, so to speak, while still paying close attention to smaller, more minute, details about each novel. These deductions will be featured in Chapter Six.

In my findings, I also include various personal examples from my own lived experiences. These examples are critical to my work, as it is autoethnographic. I weave the text connections with my detailed personal experiences by providing examples of each connection and ensuring that the rigor of autoethnography is met. The vignettes that I include in my thesis were first recorded through the means of handwritten journaling that took place while I read these novels

for the very first time, before any organizing of the data took place. The process of penning these memories was and still is quite painful for me, as I believe that I will always have an extremely emotional reaction to my brother and my interactions together. However, I knew that the outcomes of my work, foregoing graduation and hopeful later publications, would far surpass this discomfort, so I continued this process until I had read each novel. After I collected the journals and read the texts, I then matched my own experiences to events in the books. These correlations are also housed within a Google Document.

Literary Analysis

After, I had read the two novels, *A Small White Scar* and *Tru Confessions* for a second time, I then reflected on my repeated readings of these novels and the notes I had taken during these readings and while researching Nikolajeva's Theory of Narrativity. I then made a list of each of the separate entities found within the chain of communication. These distinct concepts and a reiteration of their definitions are included below:

- The Author – The author, or creator, of a text in question
 - The Real Author – The flesh and blood author of the text
 - The Implied Author – The image that a reader may have of an author while reading a text
- The Reader – The individual who immerses him or herself within the text through the act of reading
 - The Real Reader – The individual who is reading the text within a given context
 - The Implied Reader – The vision of a potential, or hopeful, reader that an author has while creating his or her work.

- The Narrator – The individual within a work who tells the story or whose point of view the reader sees the story through
- The Narratee – The recipient of this action of storytelling.

To identify evidence of each of these concepts, I included each piece of the chain of communication found within each novel. Many of my deductions included within this document are subjective, as this is the nature of these entities. Therefore, I have included my own personal interpretation of each.

The particular details of each element of this particular chain—the real author, implied author, real reader, implied reader, narrator, and the narratee—are expanded upon in detail in Chapter Two of my thesis. Additionally, these constructs and evidence of their existence are also featured in Chapters Four and Five. Chapters Four and Five also explicitly include my findings following my two research questions and use the methodologies included in this chapter to achieve these results.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

In this chapter I entail my findings in regards to my first research question, “What themes emerge in a content analysis of the young adult novel winners, from 2000 to 2014, of the Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award? How do these themes relate to my lived experiences, connections and disconnections with the texts?” In order to answer this question, I implemented the methodology of autoethnography and the theoretical frameworks of social constructionism, specifically the social media model of (dis)ability, and critical literacy. According to these specific paradigms, the findings below include themes drawn from the texts, my own personal experiences in relation to these themes, and the way identity and (dis)ability are represented in my life and in the novels.

Content, Connections, and Correlation: Answering Research Question One

To begin, I assert that literature, specifically novels that feature the (dis)abled experience, as the young adult novel winners of the Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award do, contain many of the same themes, whether pertaining to the (dis)abled individual or those surrounding him or her. The inclusion of these themes enforce many preconceived notions of the (dis)abled identity and the identities of the individuals who experience the construction of this particular identity and, thus, form his or her own thoughts concerning the self, as they relate to these individuals’ lived experiences. In this way, these award-winning novels can help me to understand my uniquely formed identity, as I am constantly interacting with the (dis)abled community. Moreover, I contend that these same literary works could do the same for others like

myself. However, before I substantiate my claim with my findings, I first include a chart, which is featured below as Table 4, that illustrates the following: the themes of my findings for Research Question One, the narrator’s relationship to the (dis)able character featured within the text, and any related plot features.

Table 4. The Collective Themes.

Theme	Key Texts	Narrator	Relationship to the (Dis)abled Character	Related Plot Features
Behavior and Sentiments of Siblings and Other Family Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Remember Dippy</i> • <i>A Small White Scar</i> • <i>Tru Confessions</i> • <i>Me and Rupert Goody</i> • <i>So B. It</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Johnny • Will • Tru • Jennalee • Heidi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cousin • Twin Brother • Twin Sister • Surrogate Sibling • Daughter 	“Metamorphosis” or maturation of non-(dis)abled character
Behavior and Sentiments of “Outsiders”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> • <i>Waiting for No One</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christopher • Taylor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Dis)abled Character • (Dis)abled Character 	Conflict that Brings Individuals Together; Educational Setting
Relating to Others (Non-(Dis)abled) Individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Memoirs of an Imaginary Friend</i> • <i>Mockingbird</i> • <i>A Small White Scar</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budo • Caitlin • Will 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imaginary Friend • (Dis)abled Character • Twin Brother 	Friendships with Older Individuals

Theme	Key Texts	Narrator	Relationship to the (Dis)abled Character	Related Plot Features
Behavior of (Dis)abled Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The London Eye Mystery</i> • <i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ted • Christopher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Dis)abled Character • (Dis)abled Character 	Use of the Mystery Genre; Meta-Physicality

Additionally, Table 4 highlights the order in which I will subsequently describe my findings. To explain, the order in which the themes and the books are listed above is the same order I follow in the presentation of the findings below. In this pattern, I expound upon the meaning and implication of each theme before including the works that fall under a particular theme and the justification for their placement. I also carefully weave specific personal vignettes to further highlight my own connections or disconnections to these themes. These memories are placed sporadically throughout the following paragraphs. However, each theme does contain at least one connection or disconnection.

Theme One: The Behavior and Sentiments of Siblings and Other Family Members

I first start by expounding upon the data that emerged from my analysis of the ten young adult novel winners of the Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award. To do this, I begin with the theme of “The Behavior and Sentiments of Siblings and Other Family Members.” This theme’s order is very important, as I found this theme to be present in all of the texts. Additionally, this motif is the one I had the strongest connection with while reading, as I have experienced and performed many of these sentiments and behavioral tendencies myself.

After reviewing the evidence of siblings and other family members' behavior and sentiments from the ten texts and tabulating what types, both broadly and specifically, of actions and perceptions that were featured, I discovered that thirteen out of the sixteen, or 81.25% of the occurrences were negative, involving feelings and/or actions of bullying, misunderstanding, overcompensation, fear, anxiety, guilt, jealousy and anger. Only three instances, or 18.75%, were positive and represented care, love, hope, self-discovery, and acceptance. I found this to be extremely odd. When I reflect back on my brothers' and my own shared life experiences, I do not dwell on the negative events. Although, at times, the negativity may seem overwhelming. I prefer to focus on the more positive moments and memories. Nonetheless, while still acknowledging my own experiences, I notice a pattern in the author's inclusions of these negative events to be due to the narrators' age and maturity level. In the ensuing sections, the implications these details have on identity, textual conventions, and my own interpretation of the connotations of these positive and negative actions and occurrences, such as the event discussed above, using what I refer to as "connections" and "disconnections," will be included (Jones & Clarke, 2007).

To explain my disconnections and connections to the behavior of siblings in these texts and my conjecture concerning the choice in narration, I must recount the details surrounding the narrators in question. Johnny, the narrator in *Remember Dippy* (2013) by Shirley Rea Vernick, is in middle school. Will, the first-person speaker in *A Small White Scar* (2008) written by K. A. Nuzum, is portrayed as a teenager, barely fifteen. Tru, the character that presents the story from her perspective in Janet Tashjian's (1997) *Tru Confessions* is only twelve years old. The characters serve as homages to that fact that older adolescents and young teenagers experience many difficult and contrasting emotions as they grow and develop into adults. They are either successfully negotiating or failing to accept their several ascribed identities. These feelings and

the behaviors that occur in response to these changes are not in any way mitigated by the fact that a (dis)abled sibling or family member does simply not comprehend things you might say or do. This causes multiple, no countless, misunderstandings. Fear and anger will also appear, if one believes that his or her sibling or family member will never, ever understand. Additionally, jealousy may arise if he or she receives more attention than the individual in question during those grueling teenage years. Therefore, two layers of identity—maturity regarding an understanding of (dis)ability and the angsty, troubled teenage persona—intersect and cause this occasional turmoil.

Examples of each of these emotions mentioned above can be found within each of the texts. Johnny, the narrator of *Remember Dippy*, is unsure how to describe his (dis)abled cousin, Remember. This misunderstanding is seen when he states, “and he's [Remember] what polite people would call different. I call him weird” (Vernick, p. 5). In *A Small White Scar*, Will is anxiously uncertain about his brother’s future. This fear becomes clear through Will’s internal monologue. He shares with the reader and no one else that:

My throat tightened, my eyes burned. My heart thumped against my ribs. It was as though I was walking on wet, slippery stones at the edge of Pacheco's Water Hole. I forced my brain to think, to give me a picture, and I saw me and Danny on the ranch forever (Nuzum, p. 69).

The culmination of these feelings of fear and misunderstanding, at times, has the potential to create jealous episodes. The non (dis)abled family member or sibling can feel ignored due to the amount of attention given to the (dis)abled individuals. Take for instance Jennalee’s feelings toward her surrogate brother, Rupert, in Barbara O’Connor’s (1999) *Me and Rupert Goody*.

Upon discovering that Rupert is now receiving the bulk of Uncle Beau's attention—attention that was once only hers—Jennalee thinks to herself, "I couldn't stop myself from feeling eat up with jealous" (O'Connor, p. 34).

Despite these feelings seeming harsh and unjustified, these often unvoiced emotional instances need to be shared with others who may not initially understand the complexity (dis)ability adds to a "typical" sibling or other familial relationship. From a autobiographical stance, I notice how, honestly, I wish I would have had similar written accounts as an adolescent or teenager, stories of another sister, family member, whomever, that felt those same feelings that I did and still do feel. Whether through reading texts like these or speaking with others, I needed and sometimes still crave to know that I wasn't and am not alone, or wrong, in my interpretations of the events that were occurring and will always be present in my life. I could have known that it wasn't just me or something I was doing wrong.

At a certain age or after experiencing certain defining moments, these characters, and also real life "supersiblings" and family members, like me, usually change their negative perceptions of their (dis)abled counterparts to ones filled with more positive emotions. I still remember when this change took place in my own life; it wasn't until I went away to pursue an undergraduate degree that I realized, through my depression, homesickness, and contemplation of my past, how my brother shaped my entire life, from the way that I viewed and treated others to my work ethic and determination, and how I am a different person due to his influence. A metamorphosis like my own is present in every single text that I analyzed, even those that do not have a non-(dis)abled narrator, making it a distinguishing text convention. Specifically, this transition occurs in the latter half of the novel, after characters have had time to mature, grow, and learn alongside

with the reader. For example, in *So B. It*, after her mother's death, Heidi shares:

I always knew that Mama loved me... I just thought she didn't have a word for it. But I was wrong. All along she had a word for love—it was just different from the one everyone else was using” (Weeks, p. 236).

Throughout the novel, Heidi expresses her frustration with the language barrier that exists between her almost nonverbal, (dis)abled mother. However, at the close of the work and after Heidi's mother's sudden passing, she perceives the meaning behind her mothers' otherwise nonsensical words. Moreover, she translates the word while also reevaluating the role her mother had in her life and her own identity of caregiver. Heidi realizes that, yes, her mother could not possess the traditional role of a mother, but she still cared for and loved her.

Theme Two: The Behavior and Sentiments of “Outsiders”

Evidence of this type confusion and other varieties of misunderstanding regarding (dis)ability runs rampant throughout these novels, particularly in the form of judgment or ridicule from who I refer to as “outsiders,” individuals who don't completely understand the (dis)ability a character may possess and are not a family member or a close friend of the family of the (dis)abled character. Thus, my second theme is “The Behavior and Sentiments of “Outsiders,”” and I open this category by reporting upon the negative occurrences involving some form of adverse actions or emotions or, in brief, simply “conflict encounters.” Distinctly, sixty percent of all encounters had between a (dis)abled individual and outsiders are thought of to be a conflict encounter and contain some sort of misinterpretation. This overwhelming amount of negativity comes in many forms such as bullying, judgment, and labeling and often takes place within some sort of school, which gives rise to the text convention of “Educational Setting.”

I categorize bullying as any unprovoked cruel behavior towards the (dis)abled character or those closest to him or her, and these actions include name calling, teasing, and other rude statements. One example of this brutish behavior can be seen in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003) by Mark Hadden when the main character, Christopher, is told that he could never be an astronaut due to his developmental (dis)ability. He recounts this conversation to his father by relaying the following conversation:

He said that it was very difficult to become an astronaut. I said that I knew. You had to become an officer in the air force and you had to take lots of orders and be prepared to kill other human beings, and I couldn't take orders. Also, I didn't have 20/20 vision, which you need to be a pilot. But I said that you could still want something that is very unlikely to happen. Terry, who is the older brother of Francis, who is at the school, said I would only ever get a job collecting supermarket trollies or cleaning out donkey shit at an animal sanctuary and they didn't let spazzers drive rockets that cost billions of pounds (Hadden, p. 25).

This above excerpt presents bullying in the form of both name calling and labeling. Terry calls Christopher a “spazzer,” and, by doing so, is ascribing Christopher an identity through his own discourse. Therefore, “spazzer” is a D-Identity, and, throughout the novel, Christopher is trying to understand his multiple and somewhat contrasting identities (Gee, 2001, p. 101). Likewise, my brother has had struggles, similar to Christopher, with his own multiple identities. Growing up, whether to tease or express anger, frustration, or even affection, I have always called my brother “weird.” When he was smaller, he quietly accepted my teasing and provocation. Later, I was met with an eye roll or the leaving of a room. Then, he adamantly challenged my use of the word

weird and told me never to call him that. He actively and verbally denied this D-identity I had place upon him, an action I see many characters in these young adult novels do.

The incident with Christopher detailed above serves as an exemplar for the particular or text convention of “Educational Setting” mentioned above. Much of the plot in many of these stories takes place within a school, whether it is a specialized, elementary, middle, or high school or even an university. As previously mentioned, Christopher is teased by someone at his school, a place that causes him much frustration. For example, he includes, “All the other children at my school are stupid. Except I’m not meant to call them stupid, even though this is what they are. I’m meant to say that they have learning difficulties or that they have special needs” (Hadden, 2003, p. 43). Christopher does not envision himself as having “special needs” as well. He denies this I-Identity fiercely, and his denial leads to even more conflict and confusion of his intertwined and multifaceted identity (Gee, 2001, p. 101).

Similarly, Taylor, the narrator and main character in *Waiting for No One* (Brenna, 2010), experiences turmoil when she attends a biology class at her local university. She struggles to remain focused and not become overwhelmed from the bombardment of multiple forms of stimuli, such as listening to the sounds of her professor giving the lecture and the chatter of her classmates speaking to one another, retaining the content of the course, acknowledging the date and concurrently the time, and tasting her newly acquired soda (Brenna, 2010, p. 38-40). She is eventually able to remain calm by focusing all of her attention on a constant object, a gray wall in her classroom. However, she must soon overcome yet another arduous, in regards to her (dis)ability, task and interact with a possible new friend.

As in the case of Taylor and her collegiate classmate’s initial meeting, these particular conflict encounters and other comparable events also have the potential to serve as an impetus

for the alignment of individuals and formations of new friendships. Collectively, these situations shape another text convention, “Conflict that Brings Individuals Together.” A similar example of this pattern can also be found in *The Curious Case of the Dog in the Night-Time*. To clarify, the story begins when Christopher, the narrator and (dis)abled character featured, discovers that his neighbor’s dog has been murdered, more specifically, stabbed with a large garden fork. The police immediately suspect Christopher to be the culprit, as he is the one who found the beloved pet. However, he is innocent and immediately begins a journey to prove his guiltlessness. During this investigation of sorts, Christopher is reunited with his mother, who he previously thought was deceased. While the initial incident was indeed horrible and quite gruesome, the unification of Christopher and his long lost parent would not have been possible without the “curious case of the dog in the night-time.” Likewise, many of the characters in these award-winning novels undergo extreme trials in order for those around them to recognize their brilliance and understand and accept the unique bond they can and later do share.

Theme Three: Relating to Others (Non-(Dis)abled Individuals)

In order to reject instances of labeling or bullying and overcome these types of catalyzing conflicts, the novels’ characters usually have a guide or mentor to help them in this process, which is a central element in the third theme of “Relating to Others (Non-(Dis)abled Individuals.” These friends come in many forms ranging from older individuals, teachers or other educational professionals, and even imaginary friends. In regards to the latter, the entirety of *Memoirs of an Imaginary Friend* (2012) details this form of notable friendship. In Matthew Dicks’ work, Max relies on his imaginary friend, Budo, to guide him through life, help him make decisions, overcome fear, and interact to others. However, by the close of the novel, Max no longer needs Budo, as he was able to overcome a traumatic experience by himself. Specifically, Max no

longer relies on Budo to help form his identity or to aid with his “performances in society” (Gee, 2001, p. 99). This bittersweet conclusion to their relationship is seen in the following passage in which Budo describes the eventual end of his life and time as an imaginary friend:

I do not need to exist for me anymore. I just want to exist for Max. I want to know the rest of Max’s story. My tears are warm. My body is warm. I cannot see myself, but I can see Max. His beautiful face stares up at the teacher he loves, the only teacher he has ever loved, and I know that he will be happy. He will be safe. He will be good. (Dicks, 2012m p. 309).

Budo may be the only imaginary friend present in these award winning young adult novels, but he is not the only confidante of sorts these children and young adults have in these texts.

Many characters also have companions and counselors in the form of teachers and elderly members of the community. These friendships’ numerous appearances generate the text convention “Friendships with Older Individuals.” In particular, *Mockingbird* (2011) features one such partnership. In the novel, Caitlin meets with Ms. Brook daily to help her overcome her social anxiety and learn proper etiquette in public interactions. Ms. Brook also helps Caitlin deal with reading others’ emotions by using a “Facial Expressions Chart” (Erskine, p. 10). This knowledge will be immensely important to Caitlin, especially as she deals with the sudden loss of her older brother, Devon, from a school shooting. However, in the beginning of the novel and during the start Caitlin’s journey to cope with this death, she believes that she does not need this extra help, but, after many failed attempts at empathy, she realizes the true benefits of Ms. Brook’s guidance. She makes a new friend, Michael, and her classmates begin to see her in a different light. These newfound confidants start to understand her unfamiliar behavior and its causes and accept her despite their disparities.

In the two separate novels, Caitlin and Max's realizations symbolize a growth in character and a further extension in the formation of their identities. At the close of Caitlin, Max, and other primary (dis)abled character's stories, they, and also the reader, realize that they no longer require their mentor to play such a large role in their lives. These individuals do not desire the constant affirmation of their (dis)abled identity by their guides. They accept their or another's (dis)ability and wish to focus on other aspects of the individual in question's identity. The mixture of influence flowing from institutions, if taking place in an educational environment, and discourses cease to exist, as the need for other means of identification arise. These examples of a bildungsroman distinctly exhibit a maturation of the characters, as they venture forward to continue to form their own individual identities in other ways, specifically through affinity groups. However, this undertaking is often met with contention or other forms of negativity.

The struggle to connect and be a member of a group of peers is one experienced by all of the (dis)abled characters in the young adult winners of the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award. These happenings are situations in which the (dis)abled character attempts to relate him or herself to non-(dis)abled characters and may seek to have common interests or dislikes with others. To clarify, I do not define this characteristic as oblivion or naivety. Rather, I indicate that these statements and actions are similar in nature to the mentoring relationship mentioned above; these intentions are one of the first steps in becoming more aware one's own identity, of the variations and similarities that exist between us all, welcoming all of these differing characteristics, and sharing the beauty of them with others.

This emergence is most evidently shown in *A Small White Scar*. In this text, Will's twin brother Denny, who has Down Syndrome, attempts to do everything that his brother does. This desire includes running away from home to compete in the local rodeo. Although, Denny's

decision to join Will on his journey almost becomes their demise, as they encounter poisonous creatures and the rising waters of a raging river. However, despite these near death experiences, the brothers make it to their destination. Through this voyage, Will intimately learns of Denny's identity, his strengths and weaknesses, and his own capabilities. Moreover he realizes how their attributes and personalities compliment one another perfectly, albeit the occasional appearances of frustration, misunderstanding, and anger.

Theme Four: The Behavior of the (Dis)abled Individual

Will's negative feelings are common amongst the siblings and other characters close to (dis)abled individuals in these novels, as exhibited in the first theme, "Behavior and Sentiments of Siblings and Other Family Members." Truthfully, these emotions are present in my own lived experiences, as are the behaviors the (dis)abled characters exhibit. Many of these actions, such as hand flapping, excessive questioning, and the need for a strict routine, are similar if not identical to the ones I witness my brother carry out on a daily basis and cumulatively form the fourth theme of "The Behavior of the (Dis)abled Individual." In fact, Spencer's conduct corresponds in every respect to Ted's in *The London Eye Mystery* (2009). I found myself in a state of disbelief when I read the following line from the book, which is an excerpt of Ted's own consciousness: "Down a black hole,' I said to myself as I ran across the playground. My hand shook itself out. 'Down a bloody black hole'" (Dowd, 2009, p. 13). Never before had I read of someone describing the participation in stemming that my brother also partakes in when he is overstimulated in regards to his heightened senses. Ted's ritual of "shaking his hand out" is the exact same as my brothers', although we use a different phrase for my brother's action. As I previously mentioned, the similarities do not end at this activity. However, the sheer overwhelming amount

of parallels are possibly problematic, as, for one character, the occurrence of every characteristic of autism that a person can possess seems impossible and somewhat convenient.

Notwithstanding my admiration for many of these authors and their courage and willingness to include such rarely spoken of issues within the (dis)abled community, I find it odd that many of the characters experience all of the possible mannerisms had by members of the learning (dis)abled community, specifically those found to lay on the Autism spectrum. While reading, the description of the character traits resembled closely the criteria found the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, or the DSM for short, and all of the standards listed under “299.00 Autistic Disorder” (American Psychiatric Association). For example, many authors both subtly and overtly include that their characters possess deficits in most or all of the following criterion: social-emotional reciprocity, nonverbal communicative behaviors for social interaction, and developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

Concurrently, these depictions promote very impersonal views of the (dis)abled characters, which further increases the distance between the (dis)abled character and other characters in the text and the reader. This withdrawn illustration is an extension of the denial of the social model of (dis)ability into the world of fiction. In this context, the authors have taken it upon themselves to ascribe their characters with an identity based solely on their prognosis; they have become the institutions themselves and are assigning I-identities to their (dis)abled characters (Gee, 2001, p. 101). I see this same act of diagnosis put forth by many of the individuals my brother has come into contact with during his seventeen years.

One event that is forever etched within my mind occurred while my brother was only in elementary school. As my brother was first being placed within a special education, segregated

classroom for certain portions of the day, the special education curriculum coordinator of my home county met with my parents to discuss Spencer's "options." Unfortunately, when they arrived, it was revealed that there were not many, if any, and, following the experiences with other autistic children she had either read about or come into contact with, the coordinator believed that my brother would not be able to accomplish many of the tasks necessary to be included in a mainstream classroom during any portion of the day. Of course, this broke my parents' hearts, and they left this meeting feeling quite defeated. However, after hearing of this conversation, Spencer's special education teacher thought much, much differently. After many hours of diligent instruction and care, she taught my brother how to read and perform simple mathematical functions, tasks others thought were impossible. This educator enforced the social media model of (dis)ability and chose to look at my brother's supposed inadequacies and transform them into gifts and strengths that could aid him and others throughout his life. My family and I are forever grateful for the work she undertook with Spencer and also her view of (dis)ability, as it helped to change our own and I'm sure countless others'.

Despite this initial labeling, like my brother's own included above, the authors also contrastingly allow the (dis)abled characters in the novels to eventually assert other facets of their identities in a plethora of ways. Indicatively, the authors insert this representation of identity through the use of the following plot features: "the Use of the Mystery Genre" and "Meta-Physicality." Coincidentally, these two patterns interact and play vital roles amongst one another, as the characters implement their unique skills and ways of thinking about the world to bring these plot features to fruition. Many young adult novels given the Dolly Gray Children's Literature award possess one or both of these conventions, such as *Tru Confessions*, *So B. It*, *The London Eye Mystery*, *Waiting for No One*, and *Memoirs of an Imaginary Friend*. Nonetheless, I

choose to focus on Mark Hadden's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, as, from the onset, its verbal transparency allows the reader to immediately realize the "Meta-Physicality" and "the Use of the Mystery Genre" found within the text.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, the novel begins as Christopher, the narrator of the tale, is on a mission to unearth the murderer of his neighbor's canine pet. This task follows the traditional format of the genre of mystery, as Christopher discovers suspects and questions these individuals for more clues. In this way, Christopher takes on the role and identity of the detective. Additionally, the climax of the novel presents two answers to two different mysteries, the one concerning the dog that Christopher and the reader are aware of initially and the other that arises later in the story regarding the "death" of Christopher's mother. Both shape his formation of identity and impact his life significantly, as does the meta-physical nature of the book in the way that it displays pieces of his already manifested identity. Throughout the story, Christopher records his musings, clues, and daily interactions in a notebook, which he immediately calls a "murder mystery novel" due to the first event he recorded (Hadden, 2003, p. 5). He begins to create this work, after a discussion with his mentor, Sioban, who encourages Christopher to pursue his passions, which are writing and creating charts. Her encouragement is also an example of the aforementioned text convention of another theme, "Friendships with Older Individuals."

Conclusion: The Interaction of Categories, Conventions, and Connections

This latter overlap of text plot features further presents the entwined essence of these ten works. The themes featured react with one another, the plot features, and my own connections, which cause irrepressible similarities to the surface for the reader to contemplate. In my analysis, I identified these four categories in order to answer my first research question, "What themes

emerge in a content analysis of the young adult novel winners, from 2000 to 2014, of the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award? How do these themes relate to my lived experiences, connections and disconnections with the texts?" The themes and subsequent connections and disconnections emerged and have been cataloged to fulfill the goal of this question. However, my assertion concerning the interactions of the previously analyzed themes, text plot features, and connections will be extrapolated upon and in more detail in Chapter Six of this thesis. However, before delving into a discussion regarding the wider significance of my work, I first focus my attention towards the literary aspects of two of these award-winning novels. This discussion can be found in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

For the second portion of my research, I narrow the scope of my investigation of the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award young adult novel winners and have chosen to focus on two particular texts, *Tru Confessions* (2007) and *A Small White Scar* (2008). I have selected these novels for my in-depth literary analysis, because I find that I have the most connections with these works. I explained this association initially in Chapter Three. Foregoing the previously designated text-to-text and text-to-world connections, I have such overwhelming abundant and powerful text-to-self connections while reading these two texts. As a sibling of a (dis)abled individual, which the narrators of the novels themselves are, I believe *Tru Confessions* and *A Small White Scar* to be the most advantageous choices to pursue when conducting a literary analysis that will compare and contrast the varying facets of the texts with my own lived experiences. In this way, I answer the second research question, "What themes emerge in the literary analysis of the young adult titles that have won the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award and also feature sibling narrators?" Below, I compile my findings according to Nikolajeva's (2005) Theory of Narrativity and categorize this theory's following designations: Implied or Ideal and Real Author, Implied or Ideal and Real Reader, and the Chain of Communication, which includes the Narrator, Narratee, and the previously mentioned participants of Reader and Author.

Narrativity, Nostalgia, and Narrowing My View: Answering Research Question Two

Author

The author is surely one of the most “surface structures” found within a text (Nikolajeva, p. 118). To explain, a reader can look briefly at a work to ascertain the identity of an author. An author’s name is usually boldly embossed on the front cover, title page, and the spine of every novel that one comes into contact with. Simply put, the name of an author is meant to be known. However, there is much more to discover about an author than first meets the reader’s eye. The name is only one dimension of this entity, the author, as there are many other features of this individual. Specifically, in this context, an author of a literary work can be thought of in two separate ways, as a real author and also as a implied or ideal author.

Real Author. To begin, I reveal a prominent and vital characteristic of the authors in question, K. A. Nuzum of *A Small White Scar* and Janet Tashjian of *Tru Confessions*. Continuing along with the interweaving theme of identity and (dis)ability, I first discuss the authors' relationships to the (dis)abled community, which I deduce from various aspects of their texts and interactions with the media. Following the theoretical framework of this study, I know that the most important details concerning an author’s life can indeed be found within a novel itself. This biographical information that can be located within the pages of author’s work is referred to as the paratext (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 2).

Nuzum’s connection to the culture of (dis)ability is available by way of the paratext, as it is divulged on the opening pages of her work in the dedication. She writes, “To Williard, the cowboy of my heart, and to Brent, my first friend in the world” (Nuzum, 2006, n.p.). In her acceptance speech when she received the 2008 Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award, she reveals Brent’s identity by sharing that her “very first friend in the world was her neighbor,

Brent, who is one year older than [her] and has PKU” (Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award). This part of her past comes through in the text, as one of the main characters, Denny, also has a genetic disorder, Down Syndrome. However, this feature of Denny is never explicitly stated but is implied through the following description put forth by his brother during a recollection of a dream in which he envisioned himself as being like Denny: “I had changed too. *My* face was all lax, *my* eyes were titled up. I had a big ol’ grin spread ear to ear (Nuzum, p. 4; emphasis in original). From this mental illustration, it is inferred that Denny has Down Syndrome, a genetic disease much different than PKU but still a (dis)ability nonetheless.

Janet Tashjian’s relationship to the (dis)abled community is much harder to unearth. Despite containing an interesting interview about her personal life at the close of her work, the paratext in Tashjian’s novel reveals nothing about her relationship to the (dis)abled community. I immediately begin to form, in my analysis, a disconnection between the author and culture of (dis)ability of which she writes. However, in a separate brief interview, Tashjian shares that *Tru Confessions* was “a novel that explored what it would have been like for [her] to grow up with a special needs sibling the way [her] husband did” (*Brief Biographies*). Simply put, Tashjian did not have a direct connection to the (dis)abled community initially but did later in life through her husband and his experiences.

As revealed in the exchange above, My interpretation based on Nikolajeva’s framework is that Tashjian’s novel is just as she wished it to be, a novel that explored what it would have been like to grow up with a sibling with a (dis)ability. To clarify, this work is a narrative that concerns itself with the daily life of Tru, an adolescent girl, who has a sibling, specifically a twin with a learning (dis)ability. In this story, Tru gives a first-hand account of the joys and tribulations of

growing up with a sibling who has a (dis)ability. For example, she unguardedly reveals the following:

The reason I know so much about jokes is because I've been the butt of a few of them. Mostly by association. My brother, Eddie, has special needs and, unfortunately, that sometimes brings out the comedian in people who don't know him. I try to ignore the comments and have the relaxed attitude about life my mother has, but most of the time I end up worrying about stupid things—like homework, whether Billy Meier likes me, or if there's any disability in me. I worry about that last one because I'm Eddie's twin (Tashjian, 2007, p. 8-9).

From this information, one can determine that these authors' personal associations are made transparent in their work. This kind of affiliation further proves my previous finding regarding “The Behavior and Sentiments of Siblings and Other Family Members,” and highlights the convoluted behavior and identity of the siblings and other family members of (dis)abled characters in these award-winning novels and in the real world. However, a similar, yet more abstract, constructor inserts ideologies of this sort that are embedded in the text.

Implied or Ideal Author. Unlike the real author, the implied or ideal author is an idea that is created purely intuitively by the reader of a text. Therefore, in the following section, I relay only my own personal experiences and subsequent deductions regarding this concept. While reading many portions of these two novels, I must confess that I felt hot tears slowly making their way down my face. This emotional reaction is not something that I was expecting, because the characters in these works of fiction are different than my brother and myself, and I have never before had this sort of experience while conducting academic research. In *A Small White Scar*, Denny has PKU, and my brother, Spencer has PDD-NOS. Tru and Eddie, the main

characters featured in *Tru Confessions*, are twins, while Spencer and I are seven years apart. After much reflection upon my sentiments regarding these books through the act of journaling, I now realize that my responses were not due to the similarities that could be found but through the subtle ideologies that were cleverly weaved throughout the novels. I was drawn to these nuances, as these smaller details are the intricate and integral pieces of my own identity and memories that I hold so dear and am, contrastingly, still grappling with. Interestingly, these principles were intentionally yet cunningly placed there for me, the reader.

This, at times, subliminal incorporation is the work of the ideal or implied author. Disregarding the facts I know about the real authors, I hypothesize that the implied authors, like me, are individuals who are very close to or supporters of the (dis)abled community. I infer this knowledge from the way that these authors push and promote the acceptance of the (dis)abled characters even after much frustration, anger, and sadness occurs even at the cost of the character who is not (dis)abled by the character who is (dis)abled. Evidence of this transformation can be seen especially in Nuzum's work when Will, contradictory to his previous beliefs, realizes the positive impact his brother has truly had on his life. Will's epiphany occurs during a conversation had with his father in which his father says:

I've seen you set your task aside and listen to your brother or help your brother, or remind him what to do. You learned tolerance from Denny, Will. And you learned patience... You learned a hell of a lot from him about what it means to truly care for another human being... and you learned a lot more about being a man that I ever knew" (Nuzum, 2006, p. 172).

It was at this moment in the novel that Will finally began to accept Denny for who his truly was and understand what Denny had taught him instead of what he had instructed Denny.

Moments like these make the reader, specifically me, infer that the authors know or have intimately heard of similar happenings of acceptance, forgiveness, hope, and love and wanted to further inform readers of the possibilities that can take place with a little patience, understanding, and meditation, as I have learned after growing and maturing alongside my own sibling who has a (dis)ability. In this way, these authors have a didactic or pedagogical purpose in mind. To explain, these creators of text include facets of emotion that siblings and close family members and friends might be ashamed or fearful to bring to light, and they wish to share these hard to vocalize feelings with others. This contribution may lessen the stigma associated with these sentiments and open dialogue amongst siblings and other family members, friends, and mentors alike. One transmitted emotion such as these is guilt. Tru experiences this complex emotion when she remorsefully and ashamedly admits the following:

Once I had a dream that it was just me, without Eddie. In my dream, I went through the day without worrying about him, with that part of my mind that is usually tuned to Eddie's frequency shut off. I woke up, surprisingly refreshed, but I felt guilty when I saw Eddie at breakfast (Tashjian, 2007, p. 67-68).

With the presence of this often-repressed emotion and others like it, these two authors specifically seem to have a vision of a reader in their mind while orchestrating these texts, a consideration that I discuss below section of “Reader.”

Reader

Real Reader. As I disclosed previously, this research has been a very intense experience, which has exposed dormant feelings and memories from deep within my mind and self. The reading of these works causes me to vividly remember my passion for the written word and my

relationship with literature. I can still envision sitting in my grandmother's lap rocking back and forth in her old, wooden chair. With her deep, soothing voice mingling with the melodic sound of the chair's creaking, I would drift off into a fictional world of wonder as she read book after book. Before long, I had memorized each worn page of the volumes we poured over every evening, and I soon craved to know more and more about these strange, little symbols that created the words I so dearly loved. Over time, I learned to read in that same magical spot, and I never rejected the opportunity to share my newfound skill with those around me.

When my mother informed me that she was pregnant, I was overjoyed. I now had someone to share the gift of literacy and all of my favorite works. After my brother, Spencer, was born, I ventured to do exactly that. I would spend hours every day showing him those same books I had read and trying so desperately to spark his interest. Despite my efforts, Spencer never wanted to read. I must admit that I still carry some bitterness from his lack of curiosity with me. I have told myself countless times that I must make up for the past and continue searching for a piece of literature that actually speaks to my brother and compels him to finally love reading. This exploration is a driving force in my work. I believe that, through my analysis of the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award, I have possibly found novels and also picturebooks that Spencer could and might love. Although, I cannot be certain of his potential enjoyment, but I am confident that I—myself and other individuals like me—were the implied or ideal readers for these two novels, which I explain below.

Implied or Ideal Reader. Upon reading Nikolajeva's definition of the implied or ideal reader, "the real author's idea of their audience as inscribed in the text," I realize that, in addition to being the real reader, I am also the ideal or implied reader (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 253). I almost perfectly fit the mold of these works' interpretive communities. Although I may not exactly be

the target age of a young adult novel reader and probably have more education, worldly knowledge, and lived experiences than a typical reader of this type of fiction, I have witnessed several occurrences similar to those had by the main characters of *A Small White Scar* and *Tru Confessions*. I find this aspect of having a shared background to be one of the most defining features of a member of an interpretive community, an element of Nikolajeva's Theory of Narrativity, which I introduced and explained explicitly Chapter Two.

Below, I further detail my similarities with the main characters of these texts and explicate how I am a member of the interpretive communities for these two novels. To begin, I empathize wholeheartedly with Tru, in *Tru Confessions*, as she worries about her own future and Eddie's prospects, defends Eddie to their classmates, and tries to overcompensate and learn everything about her brother's (dis)ability. I have done those very things repeatedly. I know how Will, in *A Small White Scar*, feels when he fears that he'll never be able to have his own life or leave home. I feel that same anxiety on a daily basis, as I contemplate the life my brother and I will lead together after the death of our parents. Other readers may find these siblings to be cold, misunderstanding, or even selfish during various instances in the novel, but I just find these siblings to be an eerie reflection of myself. With this revelation, despite the aforementioned age discrepancy, I assert that I am and other siblings of an individual with a (dis)ability are the ideal or implied readers for these two novels and possibly the other eight young adult novel winners of the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award.

The Chain of Communication

As I am the both the real and the ideal or implied reader of these two works, I also am a part of a much grander system, the chain of communication. I work together, along with the real

author, the implied or ideal author, the narrator, and the narratee, to form this sequence of events. Specifically, I am located at the close of this series. The chain of communication begins with the real authors, which in this case are K. A. Nuzum and Janet Tashjian. Then, the implied authors enter the system as constructions of the reader followed by the narrators, creations of the authors. The narratee follows the narrator, because he or she is the receiver of the formers' actions. Lastly, I, both the real and the implied or ideal reader, interact with the text and become the last two portions of the chain of communication.

As detailed above, two particular pieces of the chain of communication, the narrator and the narratee, perfectly illustrate the dual building of a text by both author and reader. The texts in question, *Tru Confessions* and *A Small White Scar*, perfectly highlight this process of co-creation, because these young adult novels have both narrators and subsequently narratees. Although, the latter is more hard to discern, because the idea of a narratee is a more theoretical concept.

Narrator

I first begin with the more easily accessible element of this portion of the chain of communication, the narrator. With the knowledge I have of both the real and implied authors, I find it hard to separate the sentiments expressed by the narrators from the ideologies of the authors. In the case of *Tru Confessions* and *A Small White Scar*, these views do happen to align. Despite the similarity of ideals, the two texts in question are quite different in format. Tru is narrating her own story by using an online journal or diary as a means of recording her emotions and events that happened that day. To emphasize this format, the novel begins with the words "KEEP OUT!" emblazoned in bold, all capitalized font (Tashjian, 2007, n.p.). This type of meta-

literary awareness, the main character serving as the author of his or her own tale, has become increasingly popular in contemporary fiction and quite common in the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award-winning works and is discussed at length above in Chapter Four as the text convention "Meta-Physicality." Somewhat differently, in *A Small White Scar*, the reader experiences the story with Will, the young male narrator. He tells the story in past tense, similar to a vivid flashback. The reader, in a way, can become Will while reading the novel and experience the story as a memory. However, this style of narration can actually muddle the idea of the narratee, which is examined below.

Narratee

Personally, it is difficult to resolve who the actual intended narratee is in these texts, as I keep trying to separate the different aspects of myself, the part of me who is a twenty-four year old woman and the other side of me who still holds her children's literature dear. This incompatibility of my identity makes it hard to fit into an intended demographic. In many ways, I feel as though the narrator is speaking directly to me. I understand so many of the emotional intricacies included in the works, as I detailed above in the "Implied Reader" section of this chapter. Nonetheless, I know that I am not currently in the target age group for these novels.

To establish a hypothetical narratee in these texts, I must revisit the idea of the narrator and the medium of which the narrators told their tales. As previously mentioned, Tru used a digital journal format, which one can infer is not meant to be read. Despite this secretive protocol, Tru directly addresses an ominous "you" throughout her entries. For example, at the close of her first journal entry, she writes, "Don't say I didn't warn you..." (Tashjian, 2007, p. 6). Therefore, she does wish for someone to view her text, but I am unsure whom. It could be herself or someone that she hopes will read her entries and understand herself and her brother better. To

reiterate, in *A Small White Scar*, Will is the narrator, and he tells his story in a very traditional way, through flashbacks. Perhaps he is reminiscing to a child, friend, himself, or even to his brother, Denny, as he begins the story in a typical storytelling fashion by including, “It was close to midnight...” (Nuzum, 2006, p. 1). Nonetheless, his audience remains unknown. Without insider authorial knowledge, I am uncertain who the intended narratee was at the time of the creation of these works.

However, in the context of my research project, I am the narratee, as I am the one who has actually read the texts and experienced what the narrator is narrating. Moreover, I experience this fiction on a daily basis. I live my life with my sibling who has a (dis)ability, and I cannot just close the book and stop experiencing my reality when things become trying. I do not intend to sound disheartened though, as I am thrilled to discover these two young adult novels and their contents, literary elements, and merits. It is also alleviating to know that there are others, other siblings, like me who feel the way I feel, see the events that I see, and love their sibling the way that I love mine.

Conclusion: The Chain of Communication and Commonalities

Nikolajeva’s Theory of Narrativity and all of its concepts aid me in my attempt at understanding this final emotional conclusion and other interpretations like it, which I will discuss further Chapter Six. Although, it is imperative to include that, by analyzing the narrative structure of *A Small White Scar* and *Tru Confessions* using Nikolajeva’s Theory of Narrativity, the above summary has met the objective of my second research question, “What themes or issues emerge in the literary analysis of young adult titles that have won the Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award and also feature sibling narrators?” This portion of the thesis allows for the dissection of the narrative structure alongside key examples found within the text.

Specifically, through this autopsy of sorts, it is apparent that many of elements of the narrative are curated to meet the needs or desires of siblings or other family members of (dis)abled individuals like myself.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to establish a comparison between the fictional depiction of the (dis)abled community and its constituents, particularly siblings, found within the ten young adult novel winners of the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award and the actual lived reality of those same individuals. After much reflection and review of my bipartite findings, two conclusions in particular have made themselves extremely apparent. Using an autoethnographic approach, I have ascertained that the young adult novels in question, specifically *Tru Confessions* by Janet Tashjian (2007) and *A Small White Scar* by K. A. Nuzum (2006), do align with important core aspects of a sibling or other family members' realities. This conclusion is based on the introspection of my own lived experiences, as revealed through the examination of the previously included connections and disconnections and the literary analysis following Nikolajeva's model. However, my analysis of the ten titles using the social media model of (dis)ability, critical literacy, and Nikolajeva's Theory of Narrativity shows that the depiction of (dis)ability in all of these ten texts still emphasize fixed views of the (dis)abled identity. This prominence of problematic portrayals of (dis)ability can be seen through the way authors present an overly generalized portrait of (dis)ability through the insertion of the most common attributes of the (dis)abilities in question and focus on the maturation of non-(dis)abled individuals over (dis)abled individuals.

An Award's Accuracy: Acknowledging a Sibling's Actuality

As I've mentioned countless times, the emotional experience that occurred while studying these texts is none like I had ever experienced. Similar to the complex feelings I felt while first reading Olsson's *New York Times* piece, I knew finally that someone understood me and could actually relate to my own life and its unique past and present occurrences when I immersed myself into these critically acclaimed works. For example, when Tru wished for "Eddie to be un-handicapped" or when Will was filled with rage and asked his father, "What about me? What about my life, the hope for my life? Who did you think would teach me the things I needed to know?" I immediately and intimately knew their heartache, outrage, joy, and hope like nothing I had ever felt before (Tashjian, 2007, p. 11; Nuzum, 2006, p. 170). With this revelation, I have determined that, in addition to being both the real and the possible ideal reader of many of these texts, these novels also serve as a mirror for individuals like as myself.

To explain, these novels directly reflect many of the very personal and often not talked about experiences had by siblings, family members, or others that are close to the (dis)abled community. After having been recognized for being "high quality fictional and biographical children, intermediate, and young adult books that appropriately portray individuals with developmental disabilities," these texts begin to exemplify the untold reality of so many (Council for Exceptional Children). The illustrations of the support system that is formed around a (dis)abled individual, which is brought forward by these texts, in turn, can create an even larger web of encouragement, specifically around the inceptive group, the family and the supersiblings like myself who so desperately crave this attention and need comfort but are too afraid to ask outright. In turn, this newly acquired attention could positively impact the identity formation of these individuals.

Areas for Improvement: Individuality in Portrayals of (Dis)ability

Although those closest to the (dis)abled community seem to have been accurately and favorably portrayed, the representation of actual (dis)abled characters placed within these novels are the topic for much concern. The first issue found regarding the depiction of these individuals is the lack of the possession of differing characteristics. In many ways, the authors of these ten novels in question create a singular homogenous being to represent (dis)ability in all of their works. Although, as a individual close to the (dis)abled community, distinctly a sibling of an individual with the autism—the developmental (dis)ability discussed in each work—I know that each person with autism is different. In fact, autism is considered to a “spectrum.” The diagnostic criteria for this developmental (dis)ability is listed as “deficits in social communication and social interaction across *multiple* contexts,” and examples given of common behavior performances are “illustrative *not* exhaustive” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; emphasis added). However, each character presented in these texts exhibits almost all of the same, somewhat stereotypical, traits of an individual on the autism spectrum. For instance, Ted, Christopher, Remember, and Caitlin all have “melt-downs,” or times when they experience sensory overload and must cut out the world until they calm down, and, specifically, Ted and Caitlin also experience the need to have to “shake out” their hands in order to regain their composure. (Dowd, 2009, p. 13). However, not all autistic adolescents must perform these rituals or experience these sensations, so I find it strangely remarkable that almost half of all the (dis)abled characters exhibit the same traits.

This almost identical view of (dis)ability is a product of the author, as the identities of the characters are ascribed by the author. These perspectives of the characters and (dis)ability become identities that are created by discourse, or D-Identities (Gee, 2001, p. 104), which are

established by the interaction between the author and the reader that takes place when Nikolajeva's (2005) chain of communication occurs. Although these novels have been applauded for their accurate portrayal of (dis)ability, they still do not allow the characters themselves to have agency and designate their own identity. This finding confirms what Curwood (2013) pinpoints in her own analysis of three young adult novel winners of the Schneider Family Book Award. Curwood, too, finds that the (dis)abled characters featured in these award-winning texts are not always able to assert their agency and shape their own identities. This deficiency also directly contrasts the power given to the individuals who are not (dis)abled, as they are free to navigate their world and discover their place in this sphere in regards to the (dis)ability that inadvertently affects their lives but that they do not possess. In this way, the (dis)abled character simply acts as an accessory to the seemingly more prevalent experience had by the sibling or family member featured, most often, as the main character to the secondary (dis)abled character.

I foresee several possible solutions to this discrepancy regarding the depiction of (dis)ability. One such option is that authors should conduct more and in-depth research regarding the (dis)ability being featured. Additionally, more siblings, others closest to the (dis)abled community, and (dis)abled individuals themselves should start to share their own stories, perhaps through more autoethnographic research as well. This would be beneficial, as these individuals could realistically portray the (dis)ability community and its constituents and positively transform the identities featured within these possible newly created texts. Concerning the author's and their acquired preliminary background information, I believe that more investigation into the (dis)abled community would certainly create a more realistic and broader view of (dis)ability. This perspective can be gained a number of ways but most certainly through interviews with and observations of those within and around the (dis)abled community. The act

of conducting extensive research has the potential to alleviate the problem of static representations. In addition, if those who are actually aware of and immersed in the (dis)abled experience were to write fiction similar to this, novels featuring (dis)ability could be more realistic and the portrayal of (dis)ability could be more fluid, as it is in reality. With the research that I bring forth, I hope that these particular untold stories can begin to appear.

While the widespread appearance of these types of novels is yet to come, my research has presently made an addition to the body of knowledge surrounding award-winning children's literature and (dis)ability. Connecting my research to studies previously conducted by Shackford (1977) and Michaels (2012), I similarly analyze a prominent children's literature award, the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award, and reveal its contributions and also deficiencies. Although, it is important to divulge that no one had previously attempted this task, but researchers have analyzed other pieces of children's literature that feature (dis)ability, as seen in the work of Dyches and Prater (2000), Robertson (1992), Vasa (1991), Ward (2002), and Curwood (2013). By closing this gap in the research, I further reveal that similarities and differences exist between the culture of (dis)ability and other minority communities, as Hilbun (2010) also found and assert that these commonalties and variances can play a role in the identity formation of both (dis)abled and non(dis)abled individuals.

Implications

Reflecting on my work as a whole, I now believe that my thesis has the potential for more widespread implications than I am able to currently provide. Although, when I first began, I thought that only I and other siblings of (dis)abled individuals would benefit from the evidence presented. However, upon completion, I know that other effects can be found within the worlds of young adult novels and education, specifically regarding the re-imagination of educators' and

students' identities and the implementation of classroom lessons that showcase (dis)ability and difference. Below, I expand upon these individual and universal repercussions and also highlight possibilities for future research.

The Significance of the Self: What This Project Has Given Me

My wishes for the world of (dis)ability fiction and its future authorship parallel my own background and possibly my future. To explain, this thesis has given me courage and a voice. Before embarking on this seemingly never-ending and emotionally trying process, I never really liked to discuss or write of my brother's (dis)ability. Despite my cowardice, as I have revealed through an autoethnographic approach, I loved to research autism and other learning (dis)abilities in order to better understand my brother's everyday reality and to become closer to him, if at all feasible. This thesis allowed me to combine this passion, alongside my affinity towards children's literature, and push my boundaries in order to actually pursue my desired topic. I shall be forever happy that I did not give up, even though at times I wished to do so in order to not reveal such painful and revealing emotions and memories. Although, with these disclosures, I hope that others, too, come forward and share their own pasts, whether it concerns (dis)ability or other forms of difference. We are all divergent in our identities and their creation, have a story to tell, and can learn from others' tales.

My plans for any future research involve this retrieval of agency and reconstruction of identity in addition to further literary analyses. The tentative goal is to hold and also simultaneously participate in a book club with members who are also siblings of (dis)abled individuals. In this study, I would implement an ethnographic approach and immerse myself into the lives of other siblings of (dis)abled individuals and analyze my experiences to their own. Likewise, I would also like to form a book club composed of members of the (dis)abled

community. Within this group, I would be an observer and conduct interviews with those involved, as they are best equipped to speak on the portrayal of their own culture. Foregoing my intentions regarding books clubs and ethnographic studies, I would definitely like to continue my work of literary analysis and investigate more young adult novels that feature (dis)ability, particularly those that are critically acclaimed and award-winning. I also invite others in this field of study to join me in this vein of research.

The Significance of the Study: Helping Others Discover (Dis)ability

To reiterate a point made previously, I include a conclusion brought forth by Lee and Anderson (2009) who share that, “in educational contexts, questions of identity are especially critical because the development of education practice and policies are grounded in different ways of understanding who learners are or should be” (p. 181). The exploration of identity by qualitative researchers is so important to the world of education. As Lee and Anderson divulge, the work conducted by these individuals and even myself has the potential to go forth and create laws, regulations, and learning and teaching styles that heavily impact teachers and students alike.

Teachers’ Identities: Learning and Living through Autoethnography. Primarily, one benefit educators may gain from this analysis is being exposed to an alternative and critical perspective, informed by the examination of lived experiences through an autoethnographic method. Florio-Ruane (2001) explains that teachers can learn from autoethnographies by reading them in the company of other teachers in the form of a book club, which is a useful conglomerate as I mentioned above. Moreover, she explains, “As members of an autobiography book club, we are taking two typically solitary activities—reading books and thinking about problems in our own practice—and making them conversational common ground” (Florio-Ruane, 2001, p. xxii).

By reading the analysis in conjunction with autoethnographic vignettes and connections, teachers can be made to feel more comfortable to discuss (dis)ability amongst themselves and, thus, with their students. Through this practice, teachers' perception of (dis)ability and those involved with the culture may also change, possibly for the better, if needed.

(Dis)ability in the Classroom. As educators' opinions of (dis)ability change, the chance that their students' own perspectives may evolve concurrently is very high. This phenomenon is due to the causation which entails that "the more frequently you observe a disability in a certain light, the more convincing that observation becomes and less likely one is to see differences among individuals with the same disability" (Byrd, Byrd, & Dillon, 1980). With the inclusion of more positive and accurate portrayals readily available to students whether through texts taught in the classroom or found within the library, students also begin to see their (dis)abled peers differently. Students are able to see that (dis)ability does not mean the same to every individual and (dis)ability is not defining or determining, as revealed in Hermans' (2006) theory of the dialogical self and the social constructionism view of (dis)ability, also known as the social media model of (dis)ability.

When students have this expansion or growth, in regards to the (dis)abled identity, the atmosphere of the classroom can also begin to look and feel different. First and foremost, a welcoming community of acceptance can begin to form. Students can support their classmates, despite any difference that may exist outwardly or aren't as physically apparent. Within this environment, teachers are then able to implement successful units involving critical literacy, which is the "use of the technologies of print and other media of communication to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rules systems, and practices governing the social fields of every life" (Luke, 2004, p. 5). With the instruction of critical literacy techniques, (dis)ability and

difference, as featured in popular culture, can be discussed in depth. These conversations are what make a difference and change the gaze that is place on the (dis)abled community and those closest to this group, specifically siblings. It is my hope that the autoethnographic conversation with myself that I have presented and extended to my readers has a similar effect in the world of children's literature and, more broadly, education.

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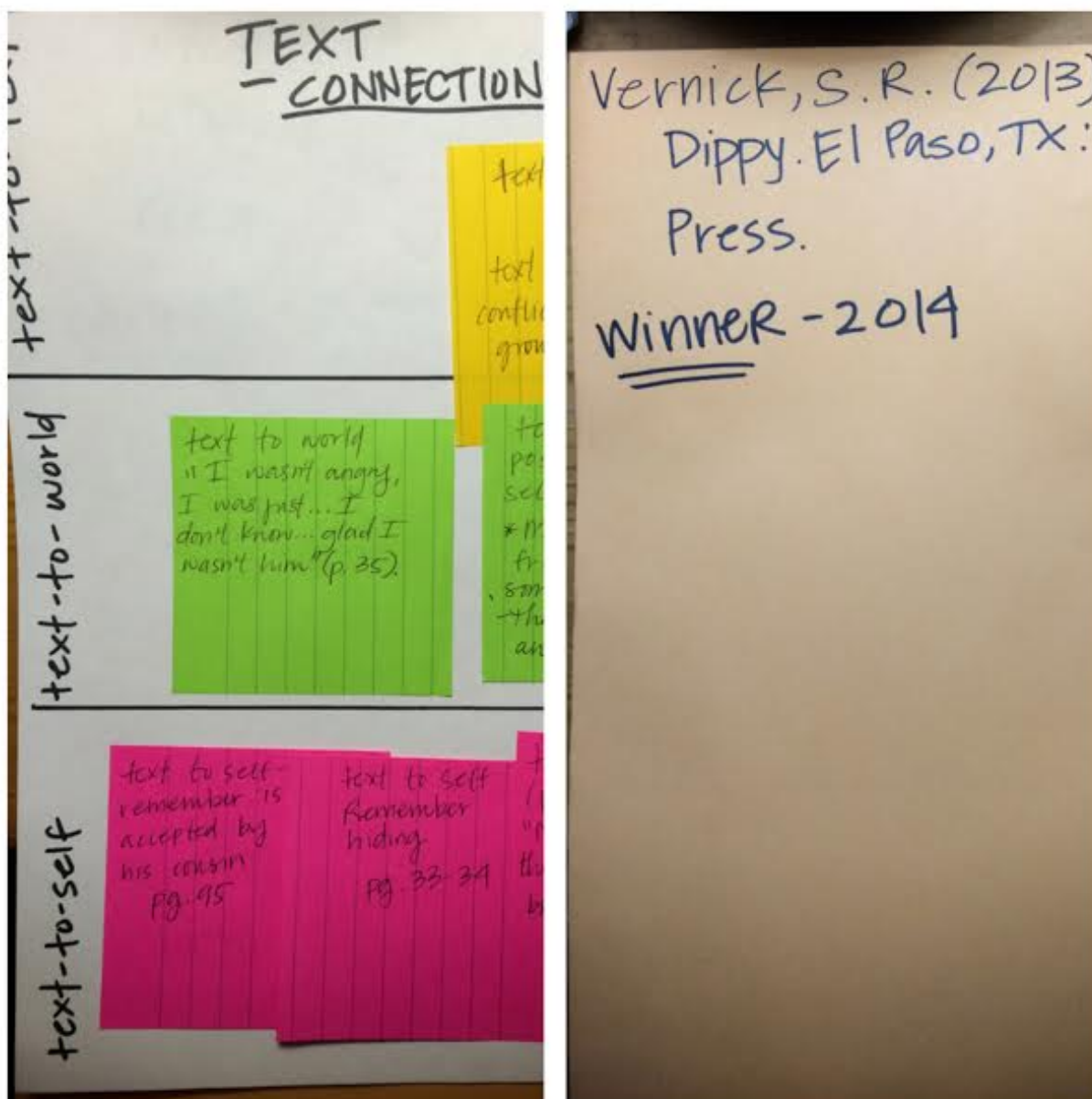
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APPENDIX A – EXAMPLE OF THE PAPER ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEM FOR TEXT
 CONNECTIONS AND DISCONNECTIONS FOUND WITHIN EACH NOVEL



APPENDIX B – EXAMPLE OF THE DIGITAL ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEM FOR CONNECTIONS AND DISCONNECTIONS FOUND WITHIN EACH NOVEL

Text Connections - Tru Confessions ☆ alexlamp@gmail.com

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	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1		Text-to-Text Connections		Text-to-World Connections		Text-to-Self Connections					
2	pgs. 8-9			Other's Perceptions - Bullying - "The reason I know so much about jokes is because I've been the butt of a few of them. Mostly by associati							
3	pg. 9					Sibling - Emotion - Anxiety - "I try to ignore the comments have the relaxed attitude about life my mother					
4	pg. 9	Theme - Absent Parent - "My mother says my father was a good guy (sensitive and well-meaning), but he just wasn't prepared for children, let alone twins, and one with specia									
5	pg. 11					Sibling - Emotion - Care - "But if I did have a wish--make that two--her's what they'd be: to have my own					
6	pg. 21			Other's Perceptions - Diagnosis - "Some of the technical terms used to described Eddie: -Developmentally Delayed -Having Special Needs							
7	pg. 23	Setting - "On the way to the cafeteria, I peek inside Eddie's classroom									
8	pg. 29-30					Behavior - "Reasons Why Eddie Is the Worst 1. The way he repeats the same thing over and over and c					
9	pg. 31					Sibling - Emotion - Hope - "I'm a pretty optimistic person usually, but today is a rainy Saturday and there'					
10	pg. 58-59					Sibling - Super Sibling - Overcompensation - "I hope you're not blaming yourself for Eddie's condition ag					
11	pg. 67-68					Sibling - Emotion - Guilt (from wishing things were different, that you didn't have to worry) - "Once I had					
12	pg. 80			Other's Perceptions - Name Calling/Bullying - "Words I Hate: toast, hanky panky (one word or two?), aluminum, pessimism, salve, camoflaç							
13	pg. 134					Sibling - Self-Discovery - "Funny, sometimes it's something a stranger says, or something you overhear,					
14	pg. 147					Sibling - Fear (of the Future) - trued: But why did I think I could cure him? Why did I want to change him?					

APPENDIX C – ORGANIZATION SYSTEM FOR AUTHORIAL INFORMATION

Author's Positionality ☆ alexlamp@gmail.com

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	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	Year Won Award	Title	Author	Year Published	Place of Publication	Author's Personal Connection to the (Dis)abled Community					
2	2000	<i>Tru Confessions</i>	Tashjian, Janet	1997	United States (Henry Holt and Cor	Her husband's sibling has a (dis)ability.					
3	2002	<i>Me and Rupert C</i>	O'Connor, Barba	1999	United Kingdom (Macmillian)	None -- Research interesting include political communication and telecommunications.					
4	2004	<i>The Curious Inci</i>	Haddon, Mark	2003	United States (Vintage)	None -- He admitted to doing no research while writing this novel (http://www.markhad					
5	2006	<i>So B. It</i>	Weeks, Sarah	2004	United States (HarperCollins)	None -- Little information can be found.					
6	2008	<i>A Small White S</i>	Nuzum, K. A.	2006	United States (HarperCollins)	Her childhood best friend has PKU.					
7	2010	<i>The London Eye</i>	Dowd, Siobhan	2007	United States (Yearling)	Kind of -- She claims to be a literary activist.					
8	2012	<i>Waiting for No O</i>	Brenna, Beverly	2010	Canada (Red Deer Press)	She has been a special education teacher, reading special, and special education cons					
9	2012	<i>Mockingbird</i>	Erskine, Kathryn	2010	United States (Penguin)						
10	2014	Remember Dipp	Dicks, Matthew	2014	United States(Cinco Puntos Press	He works with autistic and special needs children.					