

Chapter VII

Conclusion

“We must wrestle the ableism from our bones, unlearn the ableism that frames us as defects.”

Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (2017)

The representation of disability in literature has progressed throughout time, transitioning from negative stereotypes and ableist traditions to more diverse and accurate depictions of people with disabilities. This thesis analyses literary texts that depict persons with disabilities who resiliently challenge and resist the discrimination towards them. Although the characters, face distinctive and intricate challenges, they are driven by progressive ideals grounded in Enlightenment philosophy, the Disability Rights Movement, the concept of independent living, and the fundamental need for social transformation. These principles motivate them toward combating various barriers for their self-respect, freedom and to gain voice, while also trying to make their communities better. Their efforts, prompted by campaigns, legal reforms, and technological advancements, have transformed profoundly deeply rooted perceptions of disability as just worthy of sympathy. They use their voices and activism to shift societal perceptions from viewing disability through a limiting lens to recognizing it as an expression of diverse abilities. Through their efforts, they advocate for recognition, carve out their own space, and promote inclusion within the broader fabric of society.

Historically, characters with disabilities were frequently displayed as pitiable, worthless, and dependent on the assistance of abled bodied individuals for survival or as something that needs to be cured or fixed. This kind of portrayal perpetuates

detrimental preconceptions and may be destructive to those with disabilities. Disability is not a monolithic experience; it encompasses a variety of disabilities, each presenting its own challenges and possibilities. As a result, it is crucial to portray the various perspectives and life experiences of people with disabilities. Characters with disabilities need to be fully integrated and treated as complex individuals, rather than just serving as narrative devices or symbols. They need to possess agency, aspirations, and objectives, like those of other fictional character. The use of ableist language or attitudes perpetuates detrimental stereotypes, which may adversely affect those with disabilities. Individuals should refrain from using terms such as “abnormal,” “crippled,” “invalid,” “retarded,” or “handicapped,” since they may be considered negative and demeaning. People are required to function as discerning readers who are capable of offering criticisms on various literary compositions, ensuring that the portrayal of disability is both truthful and courteous. Reading and advocating for literary works authored by individuals with disabilities is crucial, since they provide significant insights and views on the disability experience. The depiction of disability in literature must be thoughtful, courteous, and real. By rejecting negative preconceptions and centring characters with disabilities, literary works may deconstruct various barriers, foster alternative perspectives, and promote empathy towards those with disabilities.

The first chapter of this research work, “Introduction” gives an overview of the historical marginalisation of persons with disabilities and changing social conceptions of disability. This chapter is divided into several sections, the first section shows how conventional historical narratives have overlooked experiences of people with disabilities, frequently owing to a lack of interest or the domination of strong social sectors that dominated historical discourse. Greek and Roman civilisations

valued physical and mental perfection. Disability was seen as a punishment or evidence of divine displeasure, resulting to infanticide, banishment from religious and social life. Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato linked disabilities to irrationality, sin, and social threats. The Judeo-Christian Bible blamed sin for infirmity. The Middle Ages, inspired by the Christian Church, disregarded disabilities as demonic possession or divine retribution. Renaissance art reflected Greek and Roman ideals of the perfect appearance, while Early modern society mistreated people with mental illness and lacked medical care. The Enlightenment introduced rationality, science, and equality. Kant, Hume, and Rousseau advocated for a more humanitarian and rational approach to disability, challenging religious and mythical explanations. The sterilisation programs of Nazi Germany and the “ugly laws” of several US states showed that disability was still perceived as a burden and inefficiency. Modern disability theorists like Lennard Davis and Eva Feder Kittay have changed perspectives. Davis criticises the pre-Enlightenment concern with a perfect body, whereas Kittay stresses interdependence and views disability as an aspect of human variation rather than something tragic. This developing knowledge supports the use of inclusive words like “differently abled” to promote respect and equality and more equitable environment. The second section provides an overview of the Disability Rights Movement; it also includes the inputs of the activists of disability rights movement. The next section deals with how disability studies develop as an interdisciplinary field of research. The introduction part also discusses how people with disabilities have been represented in literary texts and over time, how this representation has changed from being a source of sorrow or sympathy to a more nuanced view of disability as a diverse and complicated identity. It has introduced the primary texts followed by chapter plans,

literature review, research gap, research questions, aims and objectives, research methods and methodology, significance and limitations of the study.

The second chapter “From Fancy to Fact: Disease, Disability and Literature” has defined the terms and tried to develop an overall understanding of disease, disability and impairment from medical, social, philosophical as well as literary perspectives. It has discussed the types of disabilities and diseases. It has also defined the terms “normal” and “abnormal” from literary perspectives, while shedding lights on what are the things that constitute the notion of normality. It argues that disability is not the real problem; instead, it is society’s construction of “normalcy” that fosters exclusion. Norms are moulded by culture and history, changing with societal developments. They affect behavior, roles, and beliefs, often perpetuating preconceptions. These standards are conveyed by means of societal factors such as family, education, and religion, and maintained by formal and informal restrictions. Although norms promote societal unity and stability, they may also marginalise those who diverge from them. Understanding societal norms enables people to manoeuvre through society, confront injustices, and demand reform. Societies must constantly reevaluate norms to ensure harmony with equitable and inclusive principles. The chapter has talked about enlightening framework of disability theory and the contribution of the disability theorists who seek to create a more egalitarian and inclusive society that recognises the value and diversity of all individuals, regardless of their abilities. The chapter also takes into consideration critical disability theory as subsection of disability theory that examines the interactions of disability with other systems of oppression, including ableism, heterosexuality, discrimination based on race, and classism. It gives an overview of the theorists and philosophers who made significant contributions to the advancement of critical disability theory. It has

elucidated many models of disability theory, while emphasising both its significance and constraints. The chapter then discusses the evolution and significance of enlightenment philosophy as well as the contributions of Enlightenment philosophers whose writings and concepts may not be directly related to disabilities but may still be utilised to promote the inclusion of those with disabilities. Finally, the chapter shares the development of alternative discourses being influenced by the Enlightenment philosophy. The findings highlight how alternative discourses centred on Enlightenment philosophy have shaped the notion of humanity, which has been crucial for Disability Rights Movement. It also supports the idea that everyone has inherent freedoms and rights, irrespective of their abilities, therefore assists in preventing injustice and promote disability inclusion. Consequently, alternative approaches have not only helped to redefine disability but also challenged traditional notions of disability, laying the groundwork for disability rights activism. It emphasises the benefits and unique perspectives that people with disabilities offer to society and advocates for acceptance and support rather than trying to “cure” or “fix” them. Alternative approaches to disability may challenge medical as well as social frameworks and provide a more equal, wide, and universal perspective.

The third chapter “Disability and its Social and Psychological Barriers” has discussed the social and psychological impediments of disability which create limitations in the lives of people with disabilities. In the chapter investigation of *She Is Not Invisible* (2013) by Marcus Sedgwick, *Accidents of Nature* (2006) by Harriet McBryde Johnson, and *Window Boy* (2008) by Andra White suggests a noticeable alteration in the literary representation of disability, emphasising the agency, resilience, and self-efficacy of persons with disabilities. These literary works demonstrate an increasing dedication to narratives that correspond with the fundamentals of the social

model of disability, highlighting that the obstacles encountered by persons with impairments are mostly socially created rather than fundamentally biological. In *She Is Not Invisible* (2013), Laureth's quest to search for her father serves as a metaphorical voyage of self-discovery and empowerment. Her blindness does not impede her ability to traverse a new environment, underscoring the role of technology assistance, mobility training, and family support in promoting autonomy and independence. Laureth's path reflects Albert Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1977), as her confidence in her skills pushes her overcoming obstacles, highlighting the importance of self-belief in conquering cultural and psychological barriers. *Accidents of Nature* (2006) narrates the story of Jean, whose experiences in a disability camp highlight both personal resiliency and collective activism. The book contextualises personal development within the broader framework of the Disability Rights Movement of the 1970s, promoting inclusion, dignity, and self-representation. Jean and her companion Sara challenge society's pathologising perspective and attempt to redefine disability according to their own terms, asserting their need for space and representation within a traditionally exclusionary framework. In *Window Boy* (2008), Sam's existence with cerebral palsy confronts assumptions of dependence and immobility. The story emphasises that the real challenges he encounters are attitudinal and institutional, rather than fundamental to his situation. Sam's autonomy exemplifies Bandura's concept, illustrating a protagonist whose behavior is influenced by an inbuilt belief in capability. His narrative opposes the medical paradigm of disability, favouring the social model, which emphasises inclusive surroundings while promoting social interactions that acknowledge diversity and encourage equal participation. Taken together, these narratives illustrate that with enough assistance, inclusive frameworks, and innate resilience, persons with disabilities may not only survive but also flourish. They

promote a redefining of disability that emphasises dignity, autonomy, and the entitlement to full societal interaction. These literary representations serve as potent educating instruments, prompting readers to examine their own views and obligations regarding disability, while also highlighting the need for ongoing activism for accessibility, inclusion, and equality.

The fourth chapter “From Object to Subject: Independent Living and Political Intervention” includes the literary texts, *Emily Included* (2011) by Kathleen McDonnell, *This Kid Can Fly: It's About Ability (Not Disability)* (2016) by Aaron Rose Philip, and *My Name is Brain Brian* (1993) by Jeanne Betancourt, that highlight varied engaging techniques for depicting disability. These narratives challenge conventional beliefs and promote inclusive perspectives. A recurring theme throughout all three texts is the presentation of persons with disabilities via agency, autonomy, and resilience. Emily's advocacy for inclusive education, Aaron's experiences with economic and physical adversities, and Brian's management of learning differences each highlight the resilience and capabilities of individuals with disabilities. These writings oppose traditional notions of ability and disability using their narrative perspectives and personal components. Emily's narrative serves as a framework for collaborative understanding among characters and readers, fostering critical involvement with inclusive education. Aaron's first-person narrative offers the readers a profound understanding into the lived realities of cerebral palsy, building compassion and understanding. Brian's narrative, grounded on Betancourt's own encounters with dyslexia, serves as a potent indictment of educational and family stereotypes, highlighting the need for acknowledgment and assistance. Theoretical frameworks including postcolonial ideas, reader-response criticism, postmodern theory, and disability studies have clarified the intersecting themes of identity, empowerment, and

societal critique in these autobiographical narratives. Employing alternative narrative techniques not only improves our understanding of disability but also provides new frameworks for recognising marginalised realities. The findings indicate that personal disability narratives may transform reader perceptions, affect societal attitudes, and provide possibilities for academic research into inclusive storytelling techniques. Future study may investigate cross-cultural disability narratives, the aesthetics and ethics of depicting lived experiences, and the influence of these narratives on disability rights discourses. In addition, these narratives stimulate critical examination of legal and social policies, thereby enhancing larger discussions on inclusion, accessibility, and the Independent Living Movement. These novels not only serve as literary artefacts but also as activist texts that challenge ableist norms and advocate for systemic change through powerful, personal narratives.

The fifth chapter “Technology Enabled Narrative of Disability as an Alternative Approach” reveals that narratives that are facilitated by technoscientific and medical developments encourages a substantial shift in the way people with impairments are portrayed conventionally. Instead of continuing the conventional medical paradigm centred on “curing” or “fixing” impairments that perpetuated ableist traps, the selected literary works portray technology as an instrument that strengthens autonomy, agency, and identity in characters with disabilities. Through characters such as Melody from *Out of My Mind* by Sharon. M. Draper (2010), Jessica from *The Running Dream* by Wendelin Van Draanen (2011), and Jordan from *Born Just Right* by Jordan Reeves and her mother (2019), technology serves as an instrument for empowerment, dismantling physical and societal impediments. The narratives, when viewed through the lens of disability studies, actively question and dismantle ableist traps, so contributing to the development of alternative, more sophisticated and all-encompassing comprehension

of disability. The use of technological aids in narratives facilitates a paradigm shift, redefining disability not as a deficiency but as a spectrum of agency and involvement. This change helps to improve character development in the narratives and adds to wider discussions on disability, inclusion, and the ethics of depiction in literature. The chapter highlights that technoscientific innovations serve not only as narrative elements but also as potent tools that alter the perception of disability from a perspective of imperfections to one of potential, dignity, and autonomy.

The sixth chapter “Disability and Alternative Sexuality” analyses the intricate relationships of disability and sexuality utilising an in-depth examination of English literature as well as philosophy. It emphasises the transforming significance of literary works, especially works such as *Carry the Ocean* (2015), *Shelter the Sea* (2017) by Heidi Cullinan, and *Laughing at My Nightmare* (2014) by Shane Burcaw, in deconstructing stereotypes, questioning cultural norms, and advocating inclusive narratives. These works of literature provide true portrayals of persons with disabilities while emphasising the experiences of those managing both disability and non-normative sexual identities. One of the significant findings of this study is the evolution of societal perceptions on the sexuality of people with disabilities, transitioning from established prejudices to an emerging gradual acceptance. The chapter emphasises how historical and cultural narratives have perpetuated asexual or hypersexual preconceived notions, leading to marginalisation and invisibility in literature and public debate. The works examined question prevailing narratives, offering counter-representations which acknowledge variety and the complex nature of human experiences regarding sexuality. This chapter primarily examines the intersecting barriers encountered by LGBTQ+ persons with disabilities. The overall effect of prejudice related to sexuality and disability highlights the pressing need for a more nuanced, inclusive, and intersectional

methodology in literary and social representation. The absence of adequate media representations and the unavailability of sexual health services worsen the marginalisation of this population. The chapter demonstrates how personal experiences serve as forms of activism through literary characters like Emmet, Jeremy, and Shane Burcaw. These characters and writers challenge traditional notions of love, intimacy, and embodiment, presenting novel viewpoints that promote agency, dignity, and equality. The chapter claims that recognising and honouring the diversity of sexual identities and desires among those with disabilities is essential for fostering a more inclusive society. The findings demand a paradigm change in both academic discourse and broader societal perceptions. Literature, as shown by the analysed works, not only reflects social conditions but also actively transforms them. This chapter frames literary narratives as agents of transformation, encouraging educators, healthcare professionals, and the general populace to approach disability and sexuality with more empathy, understanding, and respect. Therefore, a key insight that the study in this chapter reveals is the shifting societal outlook on the sexuality of individuals with disabilities, moving away from long-standing biases toward a growing sense of acceptance.

The thesis embraces disability studies as a theoretical framework that moves away from a marginalised and discriminatory attitude to recognising as an area of study. The discourse defies the perception of disability identities as a mere binary opposition of negative and positive representations, seeing it instead as an aspect of human diversity. The discourse overcomes the binary perception of disability identity as either inferior to others, excluded, not capable, inactive, and horrific, or as like a hero a superhero, inspiring, outstanding; to embracing it as an integral aspect of human variety. Disability needs to be accepted as a facet of variety and one of the many variances within the human community, rather being seen as an alien or unusual phenomenon.

Researchers, critics, and writers of literature must depict individuals and protagonists with disabilities in a way that preserves their individuality and discourages the marginalisation of individuals with disabilities in reality. The chosen texts that depict real-life aspects of living with disabilities prioritise integration as well as awareness within the non-disabled community more than aspiring to mimic non-disabled persons. The chosen literary works in this research depict authentic experiences of individuals with diverse physiques. The research counters the common misconception that disability produces an abnormal identity, instead framing it as an outcome of human variation. This research analyses how characters with disabilities in works of literature avoid using symbolic interpretations or dramatic representations of people with disabilities. Characters with disabilities in the chosen literary works did not overcome their barriers effortlessly; rather, they faced challenges while seeking independence within the existing societal framework. This thesis has tried to employ inclusive language to depict individuals with disabilities, aiming to shield them from prejudices, humiliation, and discrimination.

Future Research Scope

The thesis focuses mostly on narratives set in a specific cultural environment. A demand for additional research includes undertaking comparative assessments across Eastern and Western cultural contexts to deepen the understanding of disability representations. Exploring how disability narratives vary and resonate within different cultural frameworks would help to understand if the topics portrayed in the analysed novels are universal or culturally particular. Future research can also investigate how changing representations in literature coincide with shifts in societal attitudes towards disability across time, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the impact of narratives on collective consciousness.

The selected texts by breaking standard narrative patterns pave the way for the diversification of literary landscapes. The inclusion of characters with disabilities as protagonists, aided by modern technology, breaks down preconceptions and prepares the door for a more diversified portrayal in literature. Given the importance of technology in crafting disability narratives, future study might investigate the changing landscape of developing technologies and their impact on representation. Examining how developments like artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and advances in assistive technologies affect the portrayal of people with disabilities can provide insights into the ever-changing relationships between technology and story.

This research work mostly focuses on physical disability, allowing potential for further investigation into narratives about intellectual and invisible disabilities. The changing nature of digital media allows for interactive and participatory narratives. Further research may investigate how technology-enabled storytelling platforms, such as interactive fiction, virtual reality, or online communities, promote a more inclusive and participatory approach to disability narratives. Examining the impact of reader interaction in co-creating narratives can provide new pathways for representation.