Redefining Disability Through the Responses of Non-disabilities in R. J. Palacio's *Wonder*

Redefinisi Disabilitas Melalui Respon Individu Non-disabilitas dalam Novel *Wonder* karya R. J. Palacio

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Abstract

This article raises the issue of disability, which is part of human diversity, although it often receives discriminatory treatment in society. This study aims to first identify the representation of people with disabilities found in *Wonder*; second, explain how society's response to people with disabilities is depicted in *Wonder*; and third, explain the implications of representation and response for the redefinition of people with disabilities in the modern era in *Wonder*. The qualitative method used in this study focuses on examining data in the form of dialogue and narration in *Wonder* to identify the characters' various responses to individuals with disabilities. The data is then analyzed by referring to Rohwerder's theory of disability models, which includes five models: charity, medical, social, human rights, and interactional, and is also linked to Stuart Hall's Representation Theory (1997). The results showed various types of community responses, including empathy, acceptance, rejection, and discrimination. The responses shown by the characters in *Wonder* represent the complex social dynamics in addressing the existence of people with disabilities in society. In short, *Wonder* is not just a novel that tells the struggle of a child with a disability, but also a mirror of cultural and social values that often stigmatize those who are considered different. This study shows that *Wonder* is not just an ordinary literary work; through the novel, it can open readers' perspectives to see that people with disabilities are actually equal. Therefore, *Wonder* exists not only as a personal story but also as an educative platform that triggers non-disabled awareness towards disabilities.

Key words: *disability; non-disabilities; wonder; rohwerder theory; disability model*

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengangkat isu disabilitas, yang merupakan bagian dari keragaman manusia, meskipun seringkali mendapat perlakuan diskriminatif di masyarakat. Penelitian ini bertujuan pertama, mengidentifikasi representasi orang dengan disabilitas yang terdapat dalam *Wonder*; kedua, menjelaskan bagaimana respons masyarakat terhadap orang dengan disabilitas digambarkan dalam *Wonder*; dan ketiga, menjelaskan implikasi representasi dan respons tersebut bagi redefinisi orang dengan disabilitas di era modern dalam *Wonder*. Metode kualitatif yang digunakan dalam studi ini berfokus pada analisis data berupa dialog dan narasi dalam *Wonder* untuk mengidentifikasi berbagai respons karakter terhadap individu dengan disabilitas. Data tersebut kemudian dianalisis dengan merujuk pada teori model disabilitas Rohwerder, yang mencakup lima model: amal, medis, sosial, hak asasi manusia, dan interaksional, serta terkait dengan Teori Representasi Stuart Hall (1997). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan berbagai jenis respons komunitas, termasuk empati, penerimaan, penolakan, dan diskriminasi. Respons yang ditunjukkan oleh karakter-karakter dalam Wonder mencerminkan dinamika sosial yang kompleks dalam menghadapi keberadaan orang dengan disabilitas di masyarakat. Singkatnya, *Wonder* bukan hanya novel yang menceritakan perjuangan seorang anak dengan disabilitas, tetapi juga cermin nilai-nilai budaya dan sosial yang seringkali menstigmatisasi mereka yang dianggap berbeda. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa *Wonder* bukan hanya karya sastra biasa; melalui novel ini, pembaca dapat membuka perspektif untuk melihat bahwa orang dengan disabilitas sebenarnya setara. Oleh karena itu, *Wonder* tidak hanya sebagai cerita pribadi tetapi juga sebagai platform edukatif yang memicu kesadaran orang tanpa disabilitas terhadap disabilitas.

Kata kunci: *disabilitas; non-disabilitas; Wonder; teori Rohwerde; model disabilitas*

INTRODUCTION

Disability is an intrinsic part of human diversity, yet it remains a site of complex social tension. The World Health Organization (2001) defines disability not merely as a medical condition, but as an interaction between individuals with impairments and their social environment. This interaction is particularly fraught in the United States, where despite legal frameworks like the Americans with Disabilities Act intended to ensure equality, societal responses are often still governed by rigid aesthetic norms and stigmatization (National Council 2018). This gap between legal inclusion and social reality suggests that disability is deeply rooted in cultural values and visual culture rather than law alone.

Literature plays a crucial role in reflecting and shaping these societal attitudes. Contemporary Young Adult (YA) literature has increasingly engaged with disability themes, as seen in works like *Out of My Mind* by Sharon M. Draper and *Rules* by Cynthia Lord. Among these, R.J. Palacio's *Wonder* (2012) stands out for its portrayal of August Pullman (Auggie), a child with Treacher Collins syndrome. Unlike typical narratives that focus solely on the disabled protagonist's internal struggle, *Wonder* offers a panoramic view of how a community like school, family, and peers, responds to physical difference. The novel mirrors the social barriers created by society, ranging from rejection to gradual acceptance.

Various studies on *Wonder* novels have been conducted, especially regarding social issues and the development of the main character. A number of researchers such as Hameed and Hassoon (2023); Nurfajriani, Maca, and Abeng (2021); and Musanto (2019) highlight the acts of bullying and discrimination against Auggie that affect his psychological condition and actions. The discussion of the research from these researchers uses several theories including Dan Olweus' bullying theory to find out the forms of verbal and physical intimidation, also the use of Abraham Maslow's motivation theory to see how being intimidated can encourage Auggie to get out of that pressure. In addition, a critical stylistics approach is also used to examine the language style used by the author of Wonder in describing acts of bullying and discrimination in the narrative of the story.

Next, the character-building process of the characters in *Wonder* is one of the dominant topics studied, especially in terms of courage and moral development. For instance, studied by Assyifa and Suhadi (2023) and Widuri, Valiantien, and Ariani (2022) examines *Wonder*'s storyline to highlight the character development of its characters with reference to Dungate's theory of courage and Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development. On the other hand, some researchers also discuss the impact of children's literature refers to *Wonder* regarding the stigma of people with disabilities. There are three previous researchers such as Casalme (2016); Pelin (2021); and Wheeler (2013) emphasize that *Wonder* serves as an educational and effective medium that has the potential to form empathy as an emotional response of young readers towards people with disabilities. Thus, to support their findings, these researchers adopt a quantitative study method.

However, most of the previous studies are focused on the psychological analysis of the main character or the impact of children's literature on readers, and not many have specifically examined various forms of human responses to people with disabilities in the context of American society as the setting of *Wonder*. Therefore, this article offers a new perspective, through the application of disability model theory. This article aims to examine non-disabilities people regarding American Society which represented through the characters in *Wonder* responds to people with disabilities. In this study, not only positive and negative forms of responses such as empathy, rejection, acceptance, discrimination, and social judgment are identified, but also how these responses reflect the social, cultural, and humanitarian values of non-disabilities responds towards people with disabilities. This paper focuses on three main points; first, identifying the representation of people with disabilities in *Wonder*; second, explaining the form of society's response to people with disabilities as constructed in *Wonder*; third, explaining the implications of representation and response to the redefinition of people with disabilities in the modern era in *Wonder*.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the social construction of disability in R.J. Palacio's novel, *Wonder* (2012). This approach facilitates a deep examination of the textual nuances specifically dialogue, narration, and character interactions, to understand how

disability is represented and responded to within the narrative structure. The primary data source is the original English version of the novel.

Data collection was conducted using a close reading technique. The researchers identified and extracted significant textual units (narratives and dialogues) that portray the interaction between the protagonist, August Pullman, and the non-disabled characters. The collected data were then categorized based on the nature of the societal response, ranging from rejection and stigma to acceptance and inclusion.

The data analysis relies on the theoretical framework of disability models proposed by Rohwerder (2015), which encompasses the charity, medical, social, human rights, and interactional models. This framework is used to dissect the ideological underpinnings of the characters' behaviors. Furthermore, Stuart Hall's (1997) Representation Theory is applied to interpret how these interactions produce specific meanings of disability within the American cultural context. The analysis proceeds in three stages: (1) identifying the representation of the disabled character; (2) examining the spectrum of non-disabled responses; and (3) discussing the implications of these representations for the redefinition of disability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings in Palacio's *Wonder*, which is the main data source of this research. The findings are presented in three main discussions including; The depiction of people with disabilities in *Wonder*, the form of society's response to people with disabilities and the implications of representation and response to the redefinition of people with disabilities in the modern era in *Wonder*.

1. Representation of People with Disabilities in *Wonder*

The construction of disability in *Wonder* centers on the tension between internal identity and external stigmatization. August Pullman (Auggie) defines himself through normative childhood activities: "*I eat ice cream. I ride my bike. I play ball*" (Palacio, 2012, p. 1), asserting an internal sense of being "ordinary." However, this self-perception is consistently disrupted by societal reactions. As Auggie notes, "*ordinary kids don't make other ordinary kids run away screaming*" (p. 1). This aligns with Stuart Hall's assertion that meaning arises through difference; Auggie's "disability" is not produced solely by his genetic condition, but by the "look-away thing" (p. 1) performed by the non-disabled public. Thus, the novel immediately establishes disability as a relational identity: Auggie only becomes "disabled" when placed within a society governed by rigid aesthetic norms.

Auggie's deviation from the norm is not intrinsic to his character but is constructed through societal responses that assign meaning to his appearance. His awareness of being "different" arises primarily from external reactions such as staring or screaming, rather than an internal sense of deficiency. This relational dynamic is vividly captured in his narration:

> I would wish that I could walk down the street without people seeing me and then doing that look-away thing. Here's what I think; the only reason I'm not ordinary is that no one else sees me that way. (Palacio 2012, p. 1)

This reflection underscores how Auggie defines his identity in contrast to non-disabled norms. It illustrates that within the American cultural context, where normative appearance is a rigid expectation, disability becomes a socially produced identity. Although Auggie perceives his daily life and internal self as "ordinary," the stigma manifested through public avoidance and the "look-away thing" forces him to inhabit an identity defined by difference. Thus, his construction of self is inextricably linked to the gaze of others.

This demonstrates that disability is fundamentally relational. Auggie is rendered "disabled" only when situated within a society governed by rigid aesthetic norms, a perspective consistent with the social model of disability. This framing anchors the novel in American cultural values rooted in appearance and social competition. Even within the private sphere, this relational identity persists, as Auggie notes:

> Via doesn't see me as ordinary. She says she does, but if I were ordinary, she wouldn't feel like she needs to protect me as much. And Mom and Dad don't see me as ordinary, either. They see me as extraordinary. I think the only person in the world who realizes how ordinary I am is me. (Palacio 2012, p. 1)

This reflection highlights Auggie's acute sensitivity to the nuances of social treatment, even from his closest allies. Although he yearns for "ordinariness," his family's tendency to view him as "extraordinary" functions as a protective barrier that paradoxically reinforces his exclusion. Auggie recognizes that in this context, being "extraordinary" is not a celebration of achievement but a euphemism for his physical limitations. Thus, even the well-intentioned protectiveness of his family inadvertently strengthens the stigma that he falls outside the category of normalcy.

Consequently, the persistent social framing of Auggie as "different" compels him to adopt a defensive approach to social engagement. He becomes hyper-aware of his environment, navigating interactions with a caution born of experience. As he explains:

> The thing is, when I was little, I never minded meeting new kids because all the kids I met were really little, too. What's cool about really little kids is that they don't say stuff to try to hurt your feelings... But they don't actually know what they're saying. Big kids, though: they know what they are saying. And that is definitely not fun for me. One of the reasons I grew my hair long last year was that I like how my bangs cover my eyes: it helps me block out the things I don't want to see. (Palacio 2012, p. 22)

This passage articulates Auggie's acute awareness of the developmental nature of prejudice. He distinguishes between the innocent, unintentional curiosity of toddlers and the calculated exclusion practiced by older peers. This aligns with findings by Jones, Changfoot, and Johnston (2021), who argue that negative stereotypes surrounding disability often intensify in peer groups, exacerbating stigma and hindering social acceptance. Auggie's decision to grow his hair serves as a physical manifestation of this psychological strain; it is a protective mechanism allowing him to filter out the conscious rejection he faces from a maturing social environment.

Maclean et al. (2017) emphasize that social and emotional support is critical to mitigating the risk of mistreatment for children with disabilities. In *Wonder*, this necessity for emotional security is portrayed not only as a special requirement for Auggie but as a universal human need. This is illustrated during an interaction with Charlotte, where she recounts her anxiety during a school play:

> "There were like hundreds of people in the audience that night... I was so, so nervous... Although she was talking to me, she really didn't look at me much. 'On opening night... I was like, 'Where are my parents? Where are my parents'?... And then I spotted my parents and I was totally fine. I didn't forget a single line." (Palacio 2012, p. 27)

In this passage, Charlotte reveals that visual contact with her parents provided the security she needed to function. This narrative parallels Auggie's own experience; just as Charlotte sought a "safe harbor" in the audience to overcome her fear, Auggie seeks similar reassurance in his daily interactions. However, the interaction also betrays a subtle disconnect: while Charlotte seeks connection with her parents, she simultaneously withholds full connection from Auggie by "not looking at him much." This juxtaposes the universal need for safety with the specific social barriers—such as averted gaze—that often isolate children with disabilities.

Consistent with Harma et al. (2022), social acceptance provides the necessary security for Auggie to express himself freely. This dynamic challenges the stereotype of the disabled figure as passively helpless, instead presenting moments of reciprocal connection, as seen in his interaction with Jack Will:

> I walked toward Jack... he looked at me right in the face, kind of daring me to look back at him... Then I actually smiled... The thing is, because of the way my face is, people who don't know me very well don't always get that I'm smiling... It just goes straight across my face. But somehow Jack Will got that I had smiled at him. And he smiled back. (Palacio 2012, p. 28-29)

This exchange marks a pivotal shift in Auggie's social experience. While his facial anomalies often create a semiotic barrier—where his internal joy is physically illegible to the outside world because his mouth "doesn't go up at the corners"—Jack successfully decodes this unconventional signal. Unlike the general public, who struggle to interpret Auggie's non-normative expressions, Jack looks him "right in the face" and responds with genuine understanding. This mutual smiling serves as a powerful symbol of inclusion; it validates Auggie's emotions and demonstrates that social barriers can be bridged when non-disabled peers look past aesthetic norms to recognize the human intent behind the face.

Consequently, Auggie cultivates a habit of avoidance, anticipating rejection in public spaces. This apprehension is tested on his first day of school, where the tension between familial support and public stigma becomes acute:

> "Everyone's just as nervous as you are," Via said in my ear. "Just remember that this is everyone's first day of school. Okay?"... I didn't catch anyone staring or even noticing me. Only once did I look up to see some girls looking my way and whispering with their hands cupped over their mouths, but they looked away when they saw me noticing them. (Palacio 2012, p. 33-34)

Here, a sharp contrast emerges between Via's attempt at normalization and the reality of the social environment. While Via tries to frame anxiety as a universal experience shared by all students, the actions of the female students immediately mark Auggie as distinct. The act of "whispering with hands cupped" serves as a micro-aggression that reinforces his status as an object of curiosity rather than a peer. Although the girls avert their gaze when caught, their behavior confirms Auggie's fear: despite his family's reassurance, his physical difference renders him hyper-visible, instantly disrupting the "ordinary" anonymity he seeks.

This constant vigilance necessitates a guarded approach to new environments, particularly in the classroom where institutional authority and peer dynamics collide. The following scene illustrates this tension during Auggie's first homeroom class:

> "August Pullman?" said Ms. Petosa... "Hi, August," she said, smiling at me very nicely... I kind of felt everyone's eyes burning into my back... and everybody looked down when I walked back to my desk. I resisted spinning the combination when I sat down... because she had specifically told us not to. I was already pretty good at opening locks, anyway... Henry kept trying to open his lock but couldn't do it. He was getting frustrated and kind of cursing under his breath. (Palacio 2012, p. 36)

This passage encapsulates the duality of Auggie's social reception. While Ms. Petosa offers a polite, institutional welcome, the "eyes burning into my back" reveal the intense, silent surveillance of his peers. However, the narrative cleverly subverts the stereotype of disabled incompetence. While the class scrutinizes Auggie for his physical difference, he demonstrates superior self-control and practical skill by resisting the urge to fiddle with the lock; a task his non-disabled peer, Henry, fails to execute. Here, social pressure ironically highlights Auggie's resilience; he is not the helpless figure the "medical model" might suggest, but a capable individual who navigates rules and physical challenges more effectively than his "normal" counterparts.

2. Forms of Community Response to People with Disabilities in *Wonder*

In *Wonder*, the social construction of disability is revealed through the divergent reactions of the characters surrounding Auggie. These responses function as a microcosm of broader societal attitudes. Auggie's father, Nate, initially embodies the Charity Model, which views disability as a deficit requiring benevolent protection rather than empowerment. This perspective is evident in his hesitation to send Auggie to school: *"We won't make you do anything you don't want to do."* (Palacio 2012, p. 7).

While outwardly supportive, this statement reinforces a paternalistic dynamic. By prioritizing Auggie's immediate comfort over his development, the father subtly frames him as a passive figure one defined by fragility rather than potential. This aligns with Rohwerder's (2015) critique that the Charity Model often undermines the agency of disabled individuals by treating them as objects of pity or care. However, this response is multifaceted; it also reflects a latent awareness of the Social Model. The father's reluctance stems not merely from a belief in Auggie's inability, but from a pragmatic recognition that the social system like the school environment, is structurally and attitudinally unprepared to accommodate difference. Thus, his protective stance serves as an indictment of a society that is not yet fully inclusive.

Analyzed through Rohwerder's framework, the father's hesitation reveals a complex interplay of disability models. Primarily, it reflects the Charity Model, manifesting as paternalistic protection. By treating Auggie as a passive figure requiring shelter—a dynamic Lakhani et al. (2024) warn can hinder emotional autonomy—the father inadvertently reinforces the stigma of fragility. However, this protectiveness is deeply intertwined with the Social Model. His reluctance is not merely about Auggie's internal deficits, but a recognition of external structural barriers; he implicitly acknowledges that the school environment is ill-equipped for genuine inclusion. Furthermore, the Interactional Model

elucidates how he navigates the specific friction between Auggie's internal psychological readiness and these hostile social contexts. In sharp contrast to this protective stance, Auggie's mother adopts a pragmatic approach rooted in resilience:

> *We can't just pretend he's going to wake up tomorrow and this isn't going to be his reality, because it is, Nate, and we have to help him learn to deal with it. We can't just keep avoiding situations that...* (Palacio 2012, p. 8)

In contrast to the father's protective hesitation, Auggie's mother embodies an American cultural ethos centered on resilience and self-reliance. Her stance marks a decisive departure from the Charity Model; rather than viewing Auggie as a passive victim requiring shelter, she champions an approach that prioritizes agency. Her assertion: "we have to help him learn to deal with it", validates the Social Model, acknowledging that the primary challenge Auggie faces is not his physical impairment, but the inevitable societal friction it generates. By refusing to "avoid situations," she implicitly accepts that disability is a socially constructed reality. Consequently, her parenting strategy focuses on the Interactional Model: equipping Auggie with the internal psychological tools necessary to navigate and dismantle the external barriers of an ableist society.

From the perspective of the Interactional Model, the mother's optimism balances an awareness of Auggie's physical reality with a belief in his capacity to adapt. Rather than viewing his condition as a barrier to entry, she focuses on building the resilience necessary for him to thrive in a complex social environment. This stance serves as a direct repudiation of the Charity Model, which typically frames disabled individuals as passive subjects defined by their dependence. By refusing to "avoid situations," she rejects the narrative of helplessness often associated with disability. Her insistence on exposure over protection affirms Auggie's agency, asserting that despite his differences, he possesses the inherent ability to navigate the public sphere on his own terms.

Thus, the mother's perspective reframes disabled individuals not as passive objects, but as autonomous agents capable of navigating complex social landscapes. However, outside the domestic sphere, responses to Auggie become more ambiguous. The character of Charlotte exemplifies this nuance:

> Charlotte had the blondest hair I've ever seen. She didn't shake my hand but gave me a quick little wave and smiled. "Hi, August. Nice to meet you," she said. (Palacio 2012, p. 18)

On the surface, Charlotte's greeting appears polite and accepting. Yet, the choice of a "quick little wave" instead of a handshake—the standard greeting in this context—signals a subtle interactional barrier. While Charlotte avoids overt discrimination, her non-contact gesture betrays an internalized discomfort or "attitudinal barrier." By maintaining physical distance despite her verbal welcome, she enacts a form of "benevolent othering," where social norms are performed but genuine connection is withheld.

Analyzed through Rohwerder's framework, Charlotte's response serves as a nuanced intersection of the Social and Interactional Models. The Social Model reveals her hesitation as an "attitudinal barrier", a manifestation of the discomfort and unfamiliarity society holds toward physical difference. Unlike aggressive rejection, this barrier is constructed through subtle norms of emotional distance. Simultaneously, the Interactional Model captures the internal tension Charlotte navigates: the friction between her conscious desire to be polite and the subconscious awkwardness that restricts her engagement. Charlotte thus represents a form of ambivalent acceptance; she offers a friendly surface gesture while maintaining a protective boundary. This demonstrates that exclusion in modern communities is often not explicit, but veiled in "polite" behaviors that subtly maintain the stigma of the "other."

In stark contrast to Charlotte's subtle ambivalence, Julian exhibits explicit discrimination, manifesting what Rohwerder terms "attitudinal barriers" through verbal aggression. His hostility is evident when he challenges Auggie's presence in a science class:

> *"The science elective is supposably the hardest elective of all... No offense, but if you've never, ever been in a school before, why do you think you're suddenly going to be smart enough...?"* (Palacio 2012, p. 24)

Julian's interrogation reveals a deep-seated bias: he immediately conflates Auggie's physical difference with intellectual deficiency. By assuming that a non-normative body implies a non-normative mind, Julian operates within a rigid Medical Model framework, viewing disability as a totalizing personal deficit rather than a simple physical variation. This "presumption of incompetence" serves as

a direct violation of the Human Rights Model, actively denying Auggie's capacity and right to participate in academic life solely based on his appearance.

In the medical model, an individual with a disability is seen as someone who has a biological disorder or deficiency that needs to be corrected or overcome. Julian's words state that because Auggie has a different physical condition and previous home schooling makes him unable to follow difficult subjects such as science. Thus, the context of disability in this model is a personal limitation that comes from within an individual, not a result of social construction. This view of the medical model is contrary to the social model. In the social model, the barriers provided by Julian's attitudes are the main cause of social exclusion of individuals with disabilities.

Meanwhile, the charity model sees Julian's response to Auggie as a form of negative response, which is thinking of underestimating others just because they are different. However, this dismissive attitude is also supported by society's assumption that people with disabilities are objects of compassion whose specifications always get special attention and treatment. This view will eventually have an increasingly negative impact on people with disabilities, as it reinforces a strong stigma of being different so as to prevent the full participation of individuals with disabilities in the public sphere including the academic field. This view of the charity model contrasts with the view of the human rights model which emphasizes equality in any field that people with disabilities can fully participate in. However, Julian's dialogue fragment is not in accordance with the principles of the human rights model. With this, it confirms that the human rights model seeks to break the stigma that people with disabilities have equal rights that must be protected, not to be doubted. The contrasting response from Julian is shown by the character Jack as described below:

"Geez, Julian," Jack said. "Just shut up." (Palacio 2012, p. 25)

A neutral response is shown by Jack's character where he openly shows disagreement with Julian's comments that question the cause of the difference in shape on Auggie's face. Although brief, it can be interpreted as a form of dissent against the discriminatory attitude shown by Julian. This means that Jack supports that Auggie has the right to fair and equal treatment in the school environment. Jack's actions are an example of an anticipatory response to the social model. That is, although there are social barriers created by society due to the application of attitudinal barriers, it does not rule out the possibility that it can be resisted. Represented through Jack's character who explicitly disagrees with Julian's arbitrary attitude towards Auggie. Thus, the brief reprimand said by Jack is a form of disagreement with the stigma that differences must be seen as a person's limitation. The rejection of this view is a contrast to the medical and charity models that view people with disabilities as to be pitied and considered different. Therefore, Jack's response becomes one of the characters who implicitly emphasizes that Auggie should not be treated differently or underestimated because of his condition.

The response shown by Jack is a verbal action that reflects a form of resistance to social discrimination against individuals with disabilities. It seems simple, but not everyone can do the same. This means that Jack's character shows a personality that is sensitive to differences and has high social awareness. Jack's speech can be used as a concrete example of how non-disabled individuals are one of the characters who can create changes in the social environment, namely through their thoughts and actions. This has the potential to create a social environment that is inclusive, fair, and respectful of human rights.

The responses of society in *Wonder* are represented through the characters around the main character (Auggie). Based on the analysis of the dialogue excerpts, it can be concluded that each character represents a diverse response to the existence of people with disabilities. Auggie's father shows a supportive but pessimistic response that only prioritizes the child's comfort. Meanwhile, Auggie's mother represents a realistic and optimistic view that Auggie with his physical differences is able to adapt outside the family environment. As for the character Charlotte who shows a normal and neutral attitude, although implicitly showing distance from Auggie because she is not fully accustomed to interacting with individuals who have physical differences. On the other hand, there is Julian who clearly shows a discriminatory attitude and verbally demeans Auggie. Meanwhile, Jack appears as a voice that supports equality and shows defense of Auggie's human rights as an individual who deserves to be treated fairly. The overall response of these characters reflects the complexity of social acceptance of people with disabilities and shows how the theory of disability models, both social models and human rights models, can be used to understand the dynamics of interactions that occur in the novel *Wonder*.

3. Implications of Representations and Responses to the Redefinition of Disabled People in the Modern Era

Wonder by R. J. Palacio is one of the literary works that explicitly displays the representation of people with disabilities through its main character August Pullman (Auggie). The depiction of Auggie in the novel is not only limited to having physical differences, but also includes how he is treated by his social environment, ranging from family, peers, to the wider community. This representation has an impact both on the characters in the novel and in reflection on the reality of people with disabilities in the modern era.

The form of response from the perspective of people with disabilities is mostly expressed by Auggie. It can be seen from how he defines himself through internal normalcy that he feels ordinary inside. Even he experiences fear due to other's reactions however, he wants to be seen as equal. So that he tries to build identity through coping and comparison.

However, it should be noted that non-disabled people also have their own perspective when viewing people with disabilities. Based on *Wonder*, mostly of the non-disabled defines Auggie through his visible appearance that he was difference from others. The fact that non-disabled experiences discomfort due to the lack of familiarity about Auggie's condition. Therefore, they often unconsciously positions Auggie as special person that need to be treated differently.

So, Auggie, who symbolically represents people with disabilities, shows the various impacts that people with disabilities can experience due to a social environment that is not inclusive. First, there is a tendency for social neglect. Where Auggie is often the center of attention because of his different physical condition, but at the same time experiences exclusion in social interactions. This means that people tend not to welcome someone with a disability, thus indirectly limiting interactions with individuals with disabilities.

Then, the unequal social treatment has an impact on self-confidence. Auggie himself is portrayed as academically bright. But he grew up with anxiety about social acceptance, even showing reluctance to appear in public spaces such as in the school environment. Although Auggie feels that he is an ordinary child like the others, the treatment of the people around him makes him question himself and feel inferior.

Lastly, Auggie experiences limitations in building social relationships. Dependence on unconditional acceptance created in the family environment makes it difficult for Auggie to establish relationships outside of that environment. This shows that the public sphere is still not enough to create a sense of security and comfort for people with disabilities to develop with a wider social environment.

Behind the narrative that describes Auggie's struggle to face challenges as a person with a disability, *Wonder* also has educational value for its readers. Through *Wonder*, which features stories from the perspective of people with disabilities, it invites readers to empathize. This is intended to make readers understand the life journey of individuals with disabilities in depth, not just from a physical perspective.

Wonder also conveys a moral message about the importance of not discriminating against individuals based on their physical condition. Through the responses of supporting characters such as Jack, Charlotte, and Julian to Auggie's physical condition, it shows that acceptance of people with disabilities is a choice of attitude. Jack and Charlotte are examples of characters who are portrayed as showing a neutral attitude and tend to accept differences. Meanwhile, Julian's character is an example of a character who responds negatively to someone's differences. In addition, Wonder also plays a role in breaking the social stigma that individuals with disabilities are synonymous with weakness and inability. *Wonder* shows that children with disabilities still have the potential intelligence and abilities that normal children can usually do.

The representation of disability in *Wonder* can be analyzed through Rohwerder's theoretical framework of disability, particularly in distinguishing between the medical model and the social model of disability. Obviously, disability is not a medical condition, but a social identity. It can be seen from how Auggie repeatedly asserts that he feels "ordinary," showing that disability emerges not from his face but from American cultural responses to his face.

Wonder is more in line with the social model of disability. The obstacles Auggie faces are not solely due to his physical condition, but because of the negative and discriminatory responses from his surroundings. The character Julian, for example, shows how explicit verbal discrimination can reinforce the stigma against people with disabilities. In contrast, characters like Jack represent the defense of the right of people with disabilities to live as equals, which refers to the Human Rights approach as proposed by Rohwerder. Thus, the novel *Wonder* does not only present an emotional story about the

struggles of children with disabilities. *Wonder* also acts as a cultural instrument that supports changes in the way society views disability issues.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *Wonder* constructs disability through the disabled character's point of view, making Auggie's first-person narrative the central representational tool. Through Auggie's perspective and supported by nondisabled characters' responses, reveals that disability is not solely a physical condition but a social identity shaped through interaction, in line with the social and interactional models of disability by Rohwerder. This article examines the representation of people with disabilities and society's response and their implications for the context of disability as constructed in the novel *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio. The study shows that the character of August Pullman (Auggie) is not only portrayed as a child with a physical disability, but also as a symbol of the struggle against social stigma and discrimination that people with disabilities often experience. Meanwhile, according to Stuart Hall's representation theory, aims that the meaning of disability in *Wonder* is produced through language, social responses, and cultural codes embedded in American society. The condition where inclusion is legally required but socially inconsistent. Different cultures might respond to disability differently, but in the American context, disability becomes an unusual condition through their appearance norms.

Therefore, by claiming his normalcy, challenging social stigma, and navigating identity through comparison with others, Auggie redefines disability from inside or his own self. In the meantime, nondisabled characters take part in the ongoing reconstruction of disability meaning through empathy, discomfort, prejudice, and acceptance. These divergent viewpoints highlight the fact that both disabled and non-disabled people co-produce disability.

At last, by demonstrating that disability is relational, socially constructed, and transformable, *Wonder* makes a substantial contribution to reframing disability in the contemporary American era. It promotes a change in perspective from considering disability as a personal shortcoming to seeing it as an identity negotiation influenced by social interactions, cultural values, and representational practices.

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