Catherine M. Gallagher. Yet Another (Mis)Representation of Disability: A Critical Content Analysis of Blindness/Vision Impairment in Young Adult Literature. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree. July, 2020. 166 pages. Advisor: Casey Rawson

As the world is becoming increasingly diverse, K-12 school librarians must be knowledgeable of trending topics in children's and young adult (YA) literature. One such topic is disability representation. Unfortunately, there continues to be misrepresentation of disability in terms of ableist language and stereotypes. The purpose of this paper is to better understand representations of blindness/vision impairment in contemporary YA literature using the critical content analysis method. Data will be collected and analyzed from five contemporary YA novels (published in 2010 or later) through Disability Critical Studies and Intersectionality lenses to demonstrate how disabled characters deserve authentic, medically accurate representation. Data will also be collected from three local school districts and three local public library systems in the central North Carolina region to identify if these books are accessible. This study has implications for school librarians, students, and authors in the future representations of disability, bibliotherapy, and Positive Identity Development.

Headings:

Blind

Collection development in school libraries

Collection development in public libraries

Content analysis

Visually impaired

Young adult literature

YET ANOTHER (MIS)REPRESENTATION OF DISABILITY: A CRITICAL CONTENT ANALYSIS OF BLINDNESS/VISION IMPAIRMENT IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

by
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A Master's paper submitted to the faculty
of the School of Information and Library Science
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in
Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

July 2020

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my professors at UNC-SILS and Otterbein University, and my family and friends, especially Dr. Sandra Hughes-Hassell, Dr. Casey Rawson, Dr. Brian Sturm, Louise Captein MFA, Dr. Amy Johnson, Mom, Dad, Hailey, Papa, and Peter. I would also like to thank my K-12 vision itinerant, Robin Litz, for teaching me how to be a great self-advocate, forcing me to learn how to read and write braille (even when I didn't want to and would hide under the table or peek through my fingers!), and helping me embrace my disability instead of running from it. Thank you all for giving me the knowledge, courage, inspiration, support, and love I need to be a great librarian, artist, and human.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all the VIP (visually impaired) kids out there. I see you, and I hear you! Your stories matter and deserve to be told.

Positionality Statement

In Spring 2019, I was about to finish my first year of graduate school at UNC and was looking forward to the schoolyear ahead. I knew I wanted to be a school librarian and was excited for my upcoming Field Experience that fall. For the last assignment for my collection development class that semester, the assignment was to curate resources for a specific population. I chose to curate resources for a fictional high school library in North Carolina that focused on materials for disabled students. This included a selection of literature that featured various types of disabilities.

Completing that assignment was my first real foray into disability literature. That summer, I read my first book where a character had the same (broad) type of disability that I do: a vision impairment. The book was *Blindsided* by Patricia Cummings. Growing up with a disability, especially an invisible one, I never thought to look for books that had characters like me because I didn’t think they existed. My twin sister and I were born premature which caused me to develop Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP). My sister was lucky in that her eyes were not as badly affected; though she also had laser eye surgery, her vision recovered enough so that she can wear contacts, drive, and has peripheral vision. Despite my low vision, I’ve always been an avid reader, especially of young adult literature, and frequented the Teen departments at my local public libraries. I would spend my free time reading books in which typical “teen” stuff happened: first loves, driving, friendships, fights with parents. While I could identify with most of the characters and their experiences—I come from a privileged, white, English-speaking middle-class home in the Chicago suburbs—I couldn't identify with them not having to wear glasses or being able to drive (ever).

Growing up, I'd always considered myself fairly "normal." I wasn't ready to embrace my disability as part of my identity, so I spent most of my childhood and adolescence trying to pretend I didn't have one. For example, I wouldn't wear my glasses all the time because I thought I didn't need them. Even if they helped a little bit, why "look" different? I always felt embarrassed of my disability because I felt like everyone would think I was "different" because I couldn't see well, and I didn't want to be different. I thought, what was in the value of being different when you could be like everybody else?

Now I know better: there's value in being different and sharing your story of difference with the world to better educate them about what it's like to be you. Luckily, I have enough vision that I can fully live independently and take care of myself. Over the years, I've grown more comfortable using assistive technologies/devices like a monocular, magnifying glass, zoom capabilities on the computer, and even my identification cane when it is dark out or I am in an unfamiliar area. I wear my glasses and prescription sunglasses almost all the time and am not afraid to ask for help or additional resources when I need it. Because of my vision impairment, I don't have any peripheral vision or depth perception, which sometimes makes simple activities like walking or running difficult because I might miss a step on the staircase or a dip in the ground.

In writing this paper, I understand that I come from a privileged background, and that not all disabled people have had the same experiences I do. For example, my parents were able to enroll my sister and I in physical therapy as early as three years old so we could develop our gross motor skills. We grew up in a "good" school district which meant I had access to a vision itinerant, orientation and mobility instructor, and other resources like CCTV. Local resources included The Chicago Lighthouse for the Blind and the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired in Jacksonville, IL, which my mom took me to when I was a toddler. In school, I learned how to read and write the entire braille code by the 8th grade, and how to be a good self-advocate.

However, that doesn't mean I had a perfect school experience. I distinctly remember a time when I was a sophomore in high school taking an elective sewing class. I was having trouble putting the thread on the needle and had asked the teacher several times if she could help me set it up. After telling my vision itinerant about my struggles, she even printed out a packet for me to give to my teacher about how to help a visually impaired/blind student use a sewing machine. But the teacher didn't pay any attention, and I ended up having to sew all my projects by hand. I remember sitting in those classes, I would feel so upset with myself that I couldn't make something simple like pajama pants like the rest of my classmates. One day, I even got the sewing needle stuck in the slot of the $400 machine and she took me out into the hallway to tell me how I almost broke it, which only made me more upset. In the long run, this was definitely a trivial project, but the fact that I couldn't do it because of my disability and the fact that she wasn't accommodating my needs was beyond frustrating. The next year, I had that same teacher for a child development class, and this time it seemed like she actually cared that I couldn’t see well as she responded to the accommodations I requested.

This anecdote leads to the several reasons I wanted to write a thesis about young adult books featuring characters who are blind or visually impaired. The first reason is because I feel it is a topic currently lacking in scholarship. I wanted to provide my own insight of what it is like to live with a vision impairment and explain why I believe it is necessary for all libraries--especially school libraries--to curate disability literature that focuses on vision impairments. From personal experience, I know that having an invisible disability can sometimes make it that much harder for disabled students to feel like they “fit in” as they look “normal enough” or can “pass” on the outside. As an adolescent, I never felt like I had a specific community to turn to--people to talk to who had the same frustrations, worries, and joys I had. Besides a few conferences I attended, I didn’t meet any other visually impaired people--especially people my own age--until I was at college, when another student enrolled who happened to have the same vision impairment I do. So far, that’s been the only time I’ve met another person with ROP, as with medical advancements, it is less common now than it was 20 years ago. I hope to meet more people with ROP someday.

The second reason for writing this thesis is that I want to help “normalize” disability. By “normalize” I mean to have all stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, curiosity, and ableism against disability taken out of the equation. Whether or not you can “see” one’s disability does not mean that disabled people don’t exist. We are your friends, your neighbors, your classmates, your students, your coworkers, your relatives, your lovers. If you have a question about our disability, ask--don’t just assume we can’t do something because we do it differently than you do. Likewise, don’t talk about us as if we aren’t in the same room as you--that’s just common etiquette.

The third and most important reason for writing this thesis is to let librarians, students, and other stakeholders know that there are books out there that do feature characters like them. When I read my first disability-themed book, I was so happy to read about topics I was familiar with or experienced: residential schools, orientation and mobility instruction, learning braille, sometimes being resentful about having a disability, etc. It was like I discovered the joy of reading again. I want students to have these same feelings I did that summer except have them all of the time.

As you will read in my paper, I hope you keep in mind what difference it can make for a child when they have opportunities to read books that honestly, accurately reflect their lived experiences. This not only validates their experiences but promotes self-confidence and ownership of their disability. They don’t have to worry about “fitting in” anymore because they fit perfectly just how they are. As a future school librarian, I strive to create this type of learning environment where all students recognize an aspect--or hopefully, several aspects--of themselves in the library collection and the library space itself. I also strive to educate those who do not yet realize the importance of this learning environment. The world is becoming increasingly diverse, and I believe libraries should continue to adapt to their patrons rather than asking for their patrons to adapt to them. The first step is acknowledging that disabled people exist, and we aren’t going anywhere. And yes, we use the library—we might even be sitting in one right now, as I am writing this in a library at Greensboro, North Carolina.

Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there is an estimated 1 billion people (15%) of the world's population that currently lives with some type of disability (World Health Organization, 2018). Of this number, Pascolini and Mariotti (2010) estimate that 285 million people are visually impaired, of which 39 million are blind. These numbers indicate how our world is becoming increasingly diverse in terms of one's ability. These numbers also raise questions for how to best serve patrons in our library environments, especially if we are unfamiliar with their individual wants, needs, and lived experiences.

Specifically, in the United States, the U.S. K-12 public education system provides disability accommodations and/or modifications to an estimated 14% of total children ages 3-21 through the Individualized Education (IDEA) Act (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). This includes provision of services through the school's library/media center. Broadly, disability accommodations can be described as "an alteration of environment, curriculum format, or equipment that allows an individual with a disability to gain access to content and/or complete assigned tasks"; while modifications include changes in the curriculum that are "made for students with disabilities who are unable to comprehend all of the content an instructor is teaching" (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology, 2019, paras. 1-3). As the

United States population continues to increase over the next few decades, there will undoubtedly be more and more students enrolled in our schools that have a hidden or invisible impairment or disability who qualify to receive services through the IDEA Act. Thus, there will be more chances for school librarians to coordinate with these students, their teachers, and families/caregivers to provide the appropriate services that best fit these students' personal and academic needs.

One way for school librarians to keep up with these changes in the K-12 population is being aware of trending topics in children's and young adult literature. Over the past several decades, a theme in children's and young adult literature has slowly emerged around portrayals of characters with disabilities. Recent national success of children's books, graphic novels, and young adult novels like *Wonder* (R.J. Palacio, 2016), *El Deafo* (CeCe Bell, 2014), and *The Gentleman's Guide to Vice and Virtue* (Mackenzi Lee, 2017) have rightly cast attention on the myriad types of disabilities that youth experience in today's world, and the need for these books in a school library collection. There are numerous benefits for acquiring texts with accurate, honest disability representation specifically in a school library collection such as these texts acting as mirrors, doors, and windows for students to see themselves in or through; engender empathy and understanding of one another's differences; and be used to teach about difficult topics like ableism, stereotypes, and even used for therapeutic purposes. Despite school librarians' best intentions of curating diverse and inclusive library collections where disability is represented, these benefits are not always present due to the continued lack of disability representation in published literature enjoyed by children and young adults, and the type of disability represented such as hearing, cognitive, visual, or emotional disabilities/impairments.

For example, consider Cockroft's 2019 article, *The Enduring Search*, in which she makes us aware of the facts that some librarians are actively trying to curate disability literature, but cannot easily find the books needed to do so because they do not yet exist. By "exist," I mean "published and available for purchase". To make this claim, Cockroft provides evidence from an October 2018 survey conducted by *School Library Journal*, which found that 62% of librarians said "books featuring characters with disabilities were in demand and hard to find," 61% of librarians said "titles with neurodiverse characters--or those with invisible disabilities--were in demand," and 41% said these books "were difficult to find" (Cockroft, 2019, p. 28). Furthermore, 81% of school and public librarians serving youth in the U.S. and Canada consider having diverse books in their collection to be "very important," including books featuring characters with disabilities (Cockroft, 2019, p. 28).

Similarly, a recent study by William and Deyoe (2014) looked at OCLC holdings and checklists of popular literature available at public, school, and academic libraries across the U.S. to see whether or not children's and young adult literature available reflected the diverse life experiences of children, parents, and students today, including characters from diverse cultural backgrounds, characters with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ characters. Out of the 5,002 libraries the researchers identified as "actively collect[ing] youth literature," the researchers found that only three academic libraries lacked literature featuring racially and ethnically diverse characters, but public and school libraries were criticized for not having a stronger collection (or any collection, for that matter) of literature featuring disability or LGBTQIA+ topics (Williams & Deyoe, 2014, p. 106). In my opinion, this study definitely brings into focus the various collection development policies, budget limitations, and other issues that exist in different geographic regions of the country as there may be ulterior factors at play for why literature covering these specific topics are presently absent from a school library's collection. Nevertheless, all types of libraries—public, academic, special, and school libraries—should consistently reflect the motto of the American Library Association (ALA) in their collection development processes: "The best reading, for the largest number, at the least cost" (American Library Association, 2008). The major gaps in library collections that Williams and Deyoe (2014) and Cockroft (2019) identified only reinforces the fact that youth from marginalized communities like disability or LGBTQIA+ are continuing to lack texts that positively reflect them, which only leads to more harm than good.

Perhaps one reason for school librarians having to endure this 'endless search' for disability literature is because of the overall lack of disability in the publishing industry itself. Despite the growing diversity in our country in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, language, religion, and ability, the characters pushed at us from publishing houses largely continue to be White, heteronormative, cisgender, and from English-speaking upper-middle class households (Crisp, Knezek, Quinn, Bingham, & Girardeau, 2016, p. 29). Why? Because these portrayals largely reflect the life experiences and cultural backgrounds of those in charge of selecting which books are to even be considered for editing and publishing. In 2016, Lee and Low conducted a much-needed survey of 1,500 book reviewer employees and 11,700 publishing employees to establish a baseline for what diversity looks like in the American publishing industry today. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, their results show that White/Caucasian is still the predominant race/ethnicity for reviewers and publishers (79%), along with the majority of employees identifying as cisgender female (78%), heterosexual (88%), and only 8% as having a disability (Lee & Low, 2016).

Like the evidence above suggests, it is one thing for school librarians to talk about wanting inclusive, diverse collections, and another thing entirely to critically curate materials that make the collection and library space truly reflect these values. Though recent social justice literature movements like We Need Diverse Books and #OwnVoices have actively encouraged and promoted the reading and publishing of authors of color and those from other marginalized backgrounds such as disability, there continues to be a gap in young adult literature featuring characters with disabilities. Specifically, a gap in the representations of blindness/vision impairment. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to better understand the representation of blind/visually impaired (BVI) characters in contemporary young adult literature by conducting a critical content analysis. I will frame this content analysis within the contexts of Critical Disability Studies and intersectionality to consider how these characters are portrayed beyond their shared identity of disability. Then, I will investigate the accessibility of these materials in local secondary school library OPAC catalogs and local public library OPAC catalogs in the central North Carolina region. Specifically, this study is limited to three local school districts and three public library systems in the Chapel Hill, North Carolina area. The results of this study will demonstrate the importance of having diverse literature available in school and public library collections, and the need for more books to be published featuring positive, authentic representations of blind/visually impaired characters that are devoid of stereotypes, ableist language, and are available in multiple formats such as regular print, large-print, electronic (such as e-books and audio books), and Braille.

In my positionality statement, I provide my experience of having a vision impairment and why I believe it is imperative that school librarians--and to a larger extent, public librarians--curate books that positively feature characters with disabilities as I believe disabled students deserve the right to see their disability fairly and honestly recognized in the library's collection. The literature review is quite longer than I originally planned as I wanted to provide background information on topics like the history of disability in the U.S., the history of K-12 education for the blind, and assistive technologies/devices that blind/visually impaired people may use as these issues are uniquely pertinent to blind/visually impaired youth. My literature review also covers the difference between blindness and vision impairment, disability stereotypes, and the continued (mis)representation of disability in 21st century literature. In my methodology section, I explain my decisions to conduct a critical content analysis and my choice to use criteria established by researchers and activists such as Heim (1994), Carroll and Penny Rosenblum (2000), and Brown (2018). I have provided a Key Terms and Theories section where I present information about the ideologies that influence me as a researcher, future school librarian, and disability advocate, as these ideologies are interwoven throughout my paper. After these explanations, I will thoroughly discuss the representation of blindness/vision impairment (BVI) in each novel. Finally, I will discuss the strengths and limitations of this study, and implications for various stakeholders such as school and public librarians, students, and authors.

Research Questions

The research questions for this paper are:

1. How are blind/visually impaired (BVI) characters represented in contemporary young adult literature?
2. Are these young adult novels accessible to K-12 students in local school and/or public library collections in the central North Carolina region?
    a. If so, what particular format(s) are they available in? How many copies does each collection have?

Literature Review

In this literature review, I will first present statistics about the disability population in the United States today, describe what a vision disability is, and the differences between blindness and vision impairment. I will provide examples of common vision impairment diagnoses and current treatments for vision disorders, including assistive technologies/devices (ATD) that blind and/or visually impaired people, including adolescents, may use to navigate the sighted world. Next, I will explain the history of disability in the U.S. before and after the IDEA Act was passed in 1975. The passing of this Act, along with the ADA Act in 1990, finally allowed disabled students the right to a free, public K-12 education and prompted legal responsibility for making all public access buildings physically accessible for disabled bodies.

The remainder of this literature review will discuss why disability representation matters in school library collections, the history of disability in children's and young adult literature, and the continued (mis)representation of disability--specifically blindness/visual impairment--in young adult literature today. To make these claims, I will present stereotypes traditionally associated with disabled characters and the ways of understanding disability through the social and medical models. Also, I will explain how disability literature can be used as mirrors, windows, and sliding-glass doors into which disabled students and nondisabled students can see themselves, view, and understand others' lived experiences, and how disability literature can be used to engender positive identity development (PID) in adolescents and bibliotherapy for students and educators. In the next section, I will present key terms and theories relevant to my critical content analysis.

Disability Today in the United States

As of 2016, according to the Disability Statistics Annual Report published by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Statistics and Demographics, it was estimated that 12.8% of people living in the United States identified as having some type of disability (Kraus, Lauer, Coleman, & Houtenville, 2018). Over half (51%) of this population was between 18-64 years old; 41.4% were 65 years or older; and children and youth accounted for 7.3% (youth ages 5-17) and 0.4% (children under 5 years-old) percents (Kraus, Lauer, Coleman, & Houtenville, 2018). These disabilities varied greatly by state, age, and type (such as vision, hearing, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, and independent living), as it is expected that people with disabilities live all across the country and are at different life stages (Kraus, Lauer, Coleman, & Houtenville, 2018). Interestingly, one's disability is determined by an annual survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau called the American Community Survey (ACS). Only one out of the six questions on this survey have to be an affirmative response ("yes") to determine one's disability status. While these questions are quite narrow, it is helpful to have this data as it highlights how many people are living with one or multiple disabilities and other struggles they encounter which can negatively affect their overall health, like obesity or poverty. What this survey does not do, however, is provide space for the opportunity to *describe* one's disability in detail.

For children and youth living with a disability, it was expected that the results would also vary by disability type and age. Specifically, 0.4% of children 5 years or younger and 0.9% of youth (ages 5-17) had a vision disability; 0.6% of youth had an ambulatory disability; 4.2% of youth (ages 5-17) had a cognitive disability; and 0.5% of children under 5 years old and 0.6% of youth (ages 5-17) had a hearing disability. Though disabled children and youth make up a small percentage of the total disabled population, overall there are 73.8 million youth living in this country (Child Stats, n.d.). Twenty-five (25) million are between the ages of 12 and 17 (Child Stats, n.d.). This number is only expected to increase by almost six percent by 2050 to 78.2 million, with 26.2 children estimated to be between 12 and 17, as reported by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (Child Stats, n.d.). This proves that now more than ever, diverse and inclusive experiences matter in school library collections.

As mentioned above, a small percentage of youth (0.13% total) are living with a vision disability. This type of disability is unique in that it is one of the most studied and continues to mystify researchers. For example, my simple search of the terms “blind or visually impaired” and “studies or findings or research” using the Boolean phrase “and” in the Global Health EBSCOhost database initially returned over 23,000 results in several formats, languages, and geographic areas--and that is just one of several databases I could search. Perhaps why there were so many search results is because of this disability’s complexity: One of “the most complicating factor[s] in describing any population of people who are blind or visually impaired is the lack of a clear, consistent, and useful definition of vision impairment” (Research Navigator, n.d., para. 4). In the following section, I will describe what a vision disability is and the differences between blindness and vision impairment, including an explanation of the terms *legally blind* versus *low vision.*

What Is Blindness? What Is Vision Impairment?

Blindness and *vision impairment* may sound like interchangeable terms, but there is a clear distinction to be made between the two. In this paper, I will be using the acronym BVI to refer to someone being either blind/visually impaired, simply because it saves space and time to write. A simple definition provided by the Lighthouse Vision Loss Education Center describes *blindness* as “the state of being completely sightless” or “[...] the condition of total blackness of vision with the inability of a person to distinguish darkness from bright light in either eye” (2013, para. 1). Whereas the term *vision impairment* (also known as *low vision*) is “[...] uncorrectable vision loss that interferes with daily activities” that cannot be corrected with surgery, prescription eyeglasses, prescription contacts, or medication (Lighthouse Vision Loss Education Center, 2013, para. 2; Duffy, 2014; Segre, 2019). Like gender identity or sexual orientation, vision impairments are on a spectrum ranging from mild to severe. Two people might have the same diagnosis but entirely different ranges of seeing ability.

Someone who identifies as having a vision impairment may also be considered *legally blind,* which is when all three of these definitions get muddled. One text I found extremely helpful when trying to find the ‘right’ definitions for the terms *blind* and *legally blind* was Beth Omansky’s *Borderlands of Blindness* (2011). Omansky herself is a legally blind independent scholar based out of the U.S. whose work focuses on bringing to light the diverse, challenging, and inspiring life experiences of legally blind people. In *Borderlands of Blindness*, Omansky writes about the ‘borderland’ of blindness--a gray area where one is identified as 'legally blind' but does not qualify for social services, and how that differs from being completely blind. I was excited to pick up this text as it sounded fascinating, and was even more thrilled when I discovered within the first few pages that Omansky is visually impaired, as this was the first scholarly text I have ever read by an author who has the same type of disability as I do.

In the beginning of her text, Omansky describes how blind people are treated differently *because* of their blindness. "They face environmental, economic, social, attitudinal, and educational barriers" that nondisabled (or nonblind) people do not experience in the same ways (Omansky, 2011, p. 5). Omansky (2011, p. 5) explains the caricature of blind people as living in "darkness," a phenomenon comforting--and no doubt created by--sighted people as they do not have to waste time wondering what a blind person can or cannot see. After all, Omansky (2011, p. 41) writes how:

> sighted people do not have to think about being sighted. [...] [S]ighted people retain the power to define categories of visual impairment, to describe how blind people need to act in order to be successful blind people--that is, to act as sighted as possible--and then, to position blind people in a no-win situation by devaluing the status of blindness and, thus, stigmatizing blind people.

Omansky's viewpoint is echoed in the prologue of Cattaneo and Vecchi's (2011, p. ix) equally entertaining and insightful *Blind Vision: The Neuroscience of Visual Impairment*:

> In fact, as sighted individuals, we are used to define a blind person as someone that "cannot" see. In other words, we just describe blind individuals' experiences borrowing from our lexicon of sighted subjects. But this probably doesn't make much sense to a congenitally blind person.

Indeed, as a visually impaired person myself, this idea has never made sense to me. How exactly could someone who is sighted be able to understand *what* and *how* I see if they are not looking out at the world from my own eyes?

This is exactly the kind of problem Omansky confronts in her text as sighted people might be unsure how to interact with a legally blind person, be distrustful towards them, and consider them in some situations as acting “too sighted”. Unlike totally blind people, legally blind people must deal with the pressure from well-meaning acquaintances, friends and family members who wish for them to be “normal,” as in, to not have a disability or act like they are disabled. In effect, blind people must internalize their own behaviors or fall prey to external pressure to “pass”--to present oneself as being sighted even though they are not--which only leads them to being “pushed and pulled back and forth across the border between sightedness and blindness, resulting in disallowance of citizenship in both lands, [leaving them] in a state of what American pacifist civil rights leader, Bayard Rustin, aptly called ‘social dislocation’” (Omansky, 2011, pp. 5-6). In the United States, the definition of *legal blindness* lends itself to more confusion as it is used to determine one’s vocational training, rehabilitation, school environment, disability benefits, low vision devices/aids, and tax exemption programs (American Foundation for the Blind, n.d.). The U.S. government defines *legal blindness* as: “A visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better-seeing eye with best conventional correction (meaning with regular glasses or contact lenses)” (American Foundation for the Blind, n.d.).

Hence, the gray area or ‘borderland’ Omansky (2011, p.7) writes about can be extremely difficult, frustrating, and tiring to navigate on a daily basis as

> [l]egally blind people face choices about trading their personal privacy for access to the material world. [...] [L]egally blind people grapple with institutional regulations that deny them some social privileges, yet they still fail to qualify for blindness services or benefits.

Moreover, she (2011, pp. 11-17) states how legal blindness is a “socially (medically, legally, and attitudinally) constructed category of impairment” and discusses how the categories of *blind, visually impaired*, and *legally blind* were created to “[...] soothe the discomfort of ambiguity that societal institutions experience when confronted with difference”. To defy this ambiguity, I believe it is necessary to learn about some common vision disorders that might appear while reading a text featuring a blind/visually impaired character. This is also important for (sighted) authors to be aware of these disorders to ensure accurate interpretation while writing a character with one or multiple disabilities.

Common Vision Disorders

Like any disability, there are a multitude of potential vision disorders one might be diagnosed with. Vision loss can occur at any point in someone’s life--at birth, during childhood, adulthood, or late adulthood--and range from mild to severe depending on factors related to the diagnosis, such as what the diagnosis is, the date of diagnosis, and how well it is managed. While doing this research, I came across several vision disorders I had never heard about before, and others that I knew of and learned more about in detail, as I personally only experience one vision disorder. Also, it was difficult for me to decide where to begin searching for information about this specific topic because I found there was so much information readily accessible on the Internet. I first started with a simple Google search to get a basic understanding of the common types of vision disorders, then searched the Global Health database for detailed information. After becoming overwhelmed with the Google search and underwhelmed with the Global

Health results, I switched to Google Scholar and found a two-part volume of literature that seemed like it had what I needed.

Generally, common types of vision disorders include a "loss of central vision, loss of peripheral vision, blurred vision, generalized haze, extreme light sensitivity, or night blindness" (Common Types of Visual Impairment, n.d., paras. 1-6). Eye disorders that can lead to a vision impairment featuring one or several of these above characteristics include Albinism, Cataracts, Diabetic Retinopathy, Glaucoma, Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD), Retinitis Pigmentosa, and Stargardt Disease (Freedom Scientific, n.d.). Other disorders include Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP), Optic Nerve Atrophy, Amblyopia ("lazy eye"), Color-blindness, Strabismus ("cross-eyes"), and Retinal Detachment/Tear (CDC, 2015; Disabled World, 2018; Willings, n.d.). It should be noted here that conditions like Astigmatism, Nearsightedness (myopia), and Farsightedness (hyperopia) are also vision disorders (known as "refractive errors"), though they are often correctable through wearing glasses, contacts, or laser eye surgery (National Eye Institute, 2019).

In particular, youth are susceptible to acquiring a vision disorder diagnosis because of several factors related to "congenital, hereditary, infectious, inflammatory, and neoplastic processes" (McLeod, Wisnicki, & Medow, 2000, p. 19). Some vision disorders can be inherited like certain strains of Macular Degeneration or Stargardt's Disease, while others like Trachoma or Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) occur because of infection, premature birth, lack of access to adequate healthcare providers, or other reasons. Because of the wide range of vision disorders that exist and the specificities unique to each person diagnosed with a certain vision disorder, there are a variety of treatments, including the use of assistive technologies and devices, that one may use to successfully navigate throughout their corner of the world.

Current Treatments for Managing Vision Disorders

"Whatever the cause, lost vision cannot be restored. It can, however, be managed" (Medline Plus, n.d.). This quote is a great introduction into considering the myriad assistive technologies, devices, and resources visually impaired people, young and old, use to successfully perform activities of daily living (ADL) and navigate their local environments, either by themselves or with the assistance of another person(s). Activities of daily living include bathing/showering, eating, using the restroom, cleaning, shopping, budgeting, and cooking meals. While it may seem like common sense that "everyone" should be able to do these activities effortlessly, easily, and independently, it can be quite a struggle for a disabled person to even brush their teeth, let alone complete other tasks that a nondisabled person is able to do without thinking about it. Therefore, I wanted to include a section about this topic in my literature review as some of these resources may appear within the texts I examine for my content analysis, along with other literature featuring characters with one or multiple disabilities. Also, this is a chance for me to educate the greater population about the existence of these resources and their uses and purposes, in order to dispel misunderstandings and stigmatization some disabled people might feel when using a disability device in the sighted, nondisabled world.

For example, Parette and Scherer (2004) studied how stigma impacted the use of assistive technologies (AT) by people with developmental disabilities. They found that children who had developmental disabilities and their families

> [...] may often be expected to use the devices selected by [Assistive Technology] team members and *be grateful* for the improved function or support they receive *despite any stigma, embarrassment, or negative image* generated by the device" as these devices are usually not aesthetically-pleasing to the eye; more-so, function over beauty (Parette & Scherer, 2004, p. 222, emphasis added).

At the beginning of the article, the authors provide an example of how a 20-year-old woman felt stigmatized by using hearing aids:

> But after getting my hearing aid, every time I went outside I wore a scarf, so that if the wind blew, people would not see that I wore a hearing aid. You just didn't see 20-year-olds wearing a hearing aid (Scherer, 2003, as quoted in Parette & Scherer, 2004, p. 218).

This woman's experience indicates the power that an assistive technology (in this case, hearing aids), originally designed to be helpful, could be harmful at the same time as the woman felt embarrassed to wear it in public as hearing loss is not traditionally associated with otherwise healthy young people.

Regarding assistive technologies/devices (ATDs) blind and visually impaired people use, a detailed report was published by authors Hu, Chen, Zhai, Gao, and Fan in 2019 in the *International Journal of Robotics and Automation* to consider future ATD design for BVI people. The devices written about include canes, glasses, hats and gloves (Hu et al., 2019, p. 580). Interestingly, the authors looked at these devices through a FCBPSS (F: function, C: context, B: behavior, P: principle, S: state, S: structure) architecture to, stating how assistive technologies can be divided into two categories--"wearable and portable devices"--and then into three more categories--"vision enhancement, vision replacement and vision substitution" (Hu et. al., 2019, p. 580). These authors' definition of assistive technology coincides with the original definition of *assistive technology* (AT) originally published in 1988 by the Technology Related

Assistance to Individuals with Disabilities Act: "Any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities" (Federal Definitions of AT, n.d.).

ATDs can also be *high-tech*, *mid-tech*, or *low-tech*, which refers to factors like whether or not the device needs electricity to operate, how much it costs, and whether there is a learning curve involved in order to be able to use it. For example, a high-tech device could be a power wheelchair; a mid-tech device could be a computer screen magnifier; and a low-tech device could be a specialized pencil grip a child uses to write (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.) Specifically for BVI people, assistive technologies include (but are not limited to) the following: service dogs, canes, electronic mobility aids (like the UltraCane, a combination of an electric cane and a long cane), reading assistance software (like the JAWS Screen Reader), text-to-speech software, refreshable Braille displays, Braille styluses, magnifiers, large print, lighting, CCTVs, electronic Braille notetakers, and audible/tactile signs and walking surfaces (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2019; Mobility International USA, n.d.; American Foundation for the Blind, n.d.). It is necessary to mention that based on how mild or severe one’s vision disorder is, along with other external factors like physical location, socioeconomic status, existing knowledge of these types of technologies/devices, and instruction for how to use these devices, that a person may feel comfortable in utilizing only one or several of these technologies on a daily basis. For example, I primarily use large print, computer screen magnification, and wear prescription eyeglasses every day, though sometimes when I am in an unfamiliar place like a new city or at night-time, I may use my identification cane to help me navigate the area.

In particular, identification canes are just one type of cane a BVI person might use during travel inside or outside of their home. Identification canes are also known as *probing canes,* which are used to locate any obstacles that may be in a person's walking path. The other type of cane is called a *support cane* for physical stability. Canes can either fold into several sections for easy travel/carrying purposes, or not fold (typically thought of as the "long white cane"), and can be made out of materials like aluminum, graphite, and fiberglass. Canes also come in a variety of "tips" that help one identify what is on the ground in front of them. These tips are easy to switch out or replace depending on the environment the person is in, for example, pencil tips, roller tips, marshmallow tips, and a metal glide, all of which function differently depending on the ground's surface (such as brick, concrete, or asphalt). Each cane tip has their own positive and negative features; it is up to the individual to decide what cane tip(s) work well for them depending on the characteristics of their local environment (Vision Aware, n.d.).

Likewise, not every BVI person requires the assistance of a guide dog. It is estimated that only 5% of people who are blind/visually impaired use a guide dog throughout the world as their "mobility aid," due to factors like their lifestyle, travel skills, and preferences (Murillo, n.d., para. 11). Unlike a regular household pet, guide dogs are rigorously trained to obey their owner's commands and lead them safely around obstacles that might interfere with the owner's ability to navigate to/from school, work, home, and other community areas. The process for obtaining a guide dog involves hard work on both the part of the new owner and the dog, and involves huge commitments of time, money, and energy as dogs need to be properly taken care of daily and have opportunities to reinforce their orientation/mobility skills for them to be useful and helpful to their owner.

Some assistive technologies/devices--I am using these terms loosely here--mentioned above involve Orientation and Mobility (O&M) training. For any BVI individual, O&M is essential for them to learn how to safely travel inside their homes, schools, and communities with or without assistive technologies (Griffin-Shirley & Pogrund, 2017, p. 1). For children at public K-12 schools in the U.S., orientation and mobility specialists are legally provided through the expanded core curriculum to "[t]each individuals who are blind or who have low vision how to move purposely, safely, and as independently as possible" (Griffin-Shirley & Pogrund, 2017, pp. 1-4). Alongside O&M specialists, children might receive instruction from a Teacher of the Blind/Visually Impaired (TBVI), whose role is to "provide direct instruction to blind and low vision students in a wide range of subjects and skills, such as Braille, and support their inclusion in general education classrooms" (Mobility International USA, n.d.). Like the terms *blind* and *vision impairment, orientation* and *mobility* are grouped together under the same umbrella but have different meanings. "*Orientation* is the ability to "know where you are, where you want to go, and how to get there," while *mobility* is "the act of going from one place to another safely and effectively… making full use of whatever mechanical, technological, or human resources needed" (as stated by Goodman, 1989, in Griffin-Shirley & Pogrund, 2017, p. 3). Examples of mechanical or technological resources may include a monocular or a GPS. Developing one's O&M skills can result in *wayfinding* or spatial problem solving, such as a student independently planning a bus route in their neighborhood and then riding the bus from their neighborhood to work (as stated by LaGrow & Long, 2011, in Griffin-Shirley and Pogrund, 2017, p. 3).

There are two ways O&M services can be provided to students, via the itinerant model, when the O&M specialist visits the student (for example, a BVI student enrolled at a public high school); and the center-based model, when the O&M specialist does not have to travel to visit the BVI student as all of the educators are in one place (for example, at a residential school for the blind). Both types of instruction have their advantages and disadvantages. Advantages of the itinerant model is that the training is provided in locations the student frequents, educational team members (like relatives or teachers) can observe the O&M instruction as it is happening in real-time, and students are allowed to stay in their schools/communities and have social, recreational, and educational experiences with their nondisabled peers. Disadvantages of this model include limited actual O&M instruction time and transportation to lesson locations like a nearby mall (Griffin-Shirley & Pogrund, 2017, pp. 16-17). On the other hand, the center-based model usually involves less travel to lesson locations as the residential environment is well-established, O&M training can occur more frequently, and collaboration is easier between O&M specialists and educational members like teachers and relatives. Drawbacks to this model are that students are not provided the chance to learn these skills inside their own homes, and family support/understanding can become difficult if the student does not live close to the family (Griffin-Shirley & Porgrund, 2017, pp. 16-17). It is evident that this instruction is quite valuable in the short- and long-term for BVI persons as it can teach them successful independent living skills, appropriate technology/device use, and promote self-advocacy and confidence in their abilities to be able to move safely and timely throughout their individual communities. However, this instruction was not always equally and fairly provided to BVI people, as I explain in the following section about the history of disability in the United States.

The History of Disability in the United States

Certainly, developments in areas such as technology, medicine, and law over the last fifty years have provided many opportunities for people with disabilities to lead happy, successful, and independent lives with or without the assistance of a caregiver. It may be tempting to say that disabled people have always been able to acquire these technologies, resources, medical, and even emotional support when needed, but some would argue that was not the case even 10 years ago. Unfortunately, life was quite difficult for disabled people before 1975 when the IDEA Act was implemented by the U.S. Congress. Presumably, life is still difficult for disabled people today who identify within other traditionally marginalized groups such as LGBTQIA+ or as a Person of Color (POC). I have split the history of disability into two brief sections--Before 1975 and After 1975--as I identify those as ‘turning points’ in the history of disability law.

Before 1975: “Monstrous Births,” Institutionalization, and Early Disability Laws

Unfortunately, America, like other countries, has a sordid history of the treatment of disabled people. In a 2019 article, authors Bain De Los Santos and Kupcyznski summarize the grim history of students with disabilities in the United States. As early as the eighteenth century, disabled people were not considered entirely human and suffered because of it, as philosophers believed people with disabilities were not intellectually capable beings (Bain De Los Santos & Kupczynski, 2019, pp. 1-2, as cited in Carey, 2009; and Brockett, 1858). For example, if someone was born with a disability at birth, they were labeled as a “monstrous birth” and “defective,” which justified “programs that sought to decrease the number of people like them” such as eugenics or institutionalization (Reagan, 2018, p. 3). These harmful societal beliefs led to disabled people being exploited on a daily basis--that is, if they were lucky enough to not be institutionalized. Such exploitation included “[a]bandonment in orphanages; exclusion from everyday life; display as attractions for public entertainment in circuses and sideshows; [...] and even execution in certain cases” (Bain De Los Santos & Kupczynski, 2019, p. 2, as cited in Spaulding & Pratt, 2015).

Likewise, disabled peoples’ families ”[...] were often ridiculed because disabilities were commonly associated with being inhuman, deviant, and even demonic,” which led families to institutionalize their disabled relative from the public in order to avoid the stigma and shame associated with disability (Bain De Los Santos & Kupczynski, 2019, p. 2, as cited in Winzer, 1993; Dybwad, 1962; and Crissey, 1975). Upon the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* in 1872, the eugenics movement gained traction, providing yet another reason for society to sterilize people they felt were physically or intellectually ‘unfit’ to reproduce (i.e., disabled people), and lock them away in an institution so that they or their potential future children would not be a disturbance to society (Bain De Los Santos & Kupczynski, 2019, p. 3, as cited in Field, 1911). Institutions, however, were not as ‘welcoming’ or ‘better’ for disabled people as they were made out to be. Through various exposés and investigations, it was found that many institutions across the United States treated patients like prisoners, were overcrowded, and even abusive to people who could not defend themselves (Reagan, 2018, p. 5).

According to Patterson (2018, p. 5), “World War II was a transformative moment for people with disabilities,” as disabled rights activists began to “challenge social and political views that characterized people with disabilities as having a medical problem that needed curing and required charity”. The decade following World War II saw the passing and amending of several federal laws regarding disabled people. For example, in 1956, amendments to the Social Security Act began providing income benefits to people with disabilities; these amendments were unique in that they provided medical insurance to disabled people between the ages of 50 and 65, along with insurance to adults 18-years or older who were disabled before turning 18 (Bain De Los Santos & Kupczynski, 2019, p. 4). Furthermore, the establishment of the Medicare Law in 1965, another amendment of the Social Security Act, provided healthcare benefits to people with disabilities along with support for low-income families and senior citizens. Three years later, the Architectural Barriers Act was passed which requires federally funded buildings and resources like schools, public housing, and public transportation, to be physically accessible for disabled people, including the use of ramps and restroom design.

Finally, in 1973 the Rehabilitation Act was written to replace the Vocational Rehabilitation Act (1973). Identified as a civil rights act, the Rehabilitation Act extended and revised the “funding of state grants for vocational rehabilitation services, specifically for people with severe disabilities” (Bain De Los Santos & Kupczynski, 2019, p. 5, as cited in Becker & Palladino, 2016). This act also “expanded Federal responsibilities, research and educational programs as well as identifying responsibilities for the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare" (Bain De Los Santos & Kupczynski, 2019, p. 5, as cited in Becker & Palladino, 2016). Particularly, the 504 Section in the Rehabilitation Act "[...] deters discrimination on the basis of a student's disabling condition," requiring schools to provide students with disabilities "comparable accommodations" equivalent of those provided for their non-disabled peers (Bain De Los Santos & Kupczynski, 2019, p. 5).

After 1975: The IDEA Act and the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Act

Following the passing of the Rehabilitation Act in 1973, the Education for All Handicapped Children (EAHC) Act was passed in 1975. This act was later expanded and renamed as the Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) Act in 1988 (Patterson, 2018, p. 8). The IDEA Act is a federal law that ensures "a free appropriate public education to children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to these children" (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, n.d.). In 2015, the U.S. Congress amended the IDEA Act to include an act titled Every Student Succeeds, in which they state:

> Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, n.d.).

Another remarkable law for disabled people was the passing of the American Disabilities Act (ADA) on July 26, 1990. Declared "one of the most expansive civil rights laws in American history and the first comprehensive disability rights law in the world," the ADA outlaws disability employment discrimination by private entities, public services, and public accommodations (Patterson, 2018, p. 15). In 2008, Congress made amendments to the ADA Act to close gaps in the original law and expanded the definition of *disability* to include other types of disability or impairment that had not been previously protected under the law.

Disability Activism

"We are only as handicapped as society makes us" (Patterson, 2018, p. 12). Indeed, the present laws protecting the disabled from any type of discrimination or harassment--including unemployment, inadequate educational opportunities, and accessibility of buildings and public transportation--may not have existed today if it were not for the hard work, time, and dedication by disability activists to ensure that disabled people were ensured the same rights and treatment under the law as nondisabled people. As early as the late nineteenth century, people with disabilities were organizing, networking, protesting, and challenging the attitudes, policies, and inaccessibly built environments around them (Patterson, 2018, p. 1). Specifically for the blind community, the 1930s were full of activism as people campaigned for white-cane laws (a law requiring drivers to yield for BVI pedestrians when crossing an intersection), an increase in the amount of local and state blind organizations across the country, and for "economic citizenship" (Patterson, 2018, p. 3; American Council of the Blind, n.d.). The establishment of the National Federation for the Blind (NFB) in 1940 "fought discrimination that excluded blind men from economic citizenship [and…] [e]mphasized the physical fitness and productivity of blind people as both citizens and workers" (Patterson, 2018, p. 3).

While we have come a long way over the past one-hundred years for disability rights through the approval of legislation like the Social Security Act, IDEA Act, and the

ADA Act, I think there is still a long way to go before people with disabilities are truly seen as equals to the nondisabled members of society. As of the twenty-first century, "the story of disability rights remains incomplete," as people with disabilities throughout America and the rest of the world still face housing and transportation insecurities, poverty, employment discrimination, and prejudice (Patterson, 2018, pp. 16-17). Unfortunately, this type of treatment has overflowed into the American education system.

History of Blind/Visually Impaired K-12 Education in the United States

Central to the history of disability and disability activism in the United States is the education of disabled students, particularly blind/visually impaired (BVI) students. I chose to include this section as some of the curriculum topics presented below may appear in texts featuring adolescent (ages 12-18) BVI characters who receive education at a public school or residential school for the blind. For example, a character might learn Braille or have Orientation and Mobility (O&M) instruction via a Teacher for the Blind/Visually Impaired (TBVI) or O&M specialist. By *texts* I mean any type of media that is consumed for enjoyment or new knowledge, such as literature (fiction and nonfiction), TV shows, and movies.

Currently, 7 million students across the U.S. are served under the IDEA Act for having some type of disability or impairment (Children and Youth with Disabilities, 2019). While blind/visually impaired (BVI) students--defined as ages 3-21--only make up 0.5% of the total population that receives these services, the total amount of time (at least 80%) disabled students spent in general curriculum classes has greatly increased from 47% to 63% between 2000 and 2017 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

This indicates a decline in students attending residential schools for the blind or rehabilitation programs, and an increase in K-12 public school attendance, where students' individual education needs are met alongside their general education requirements. In the special education field, this kind of instruction is called push-in, when the student is provided "instructional support, differentiated instruction, or related services" inside the classroom; whereas the pull-out method is when the instructional support or related services are provided in a one-on-one or small-group setting *outside* of the general education classroom for a more intimate, individualized experience (Morin, n.d.). The student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) determines whether the student is pushed-in or pulled-out of the classroom.

As noted in the previous section, disabled children and adults were often institutionalized well into the second half of the twentieth century, which limited their prospects of receiving an adequate education… if they received any education at all. Fortunately, Samuel G. Howe wanted to help disabled students succeed inside and outside of the classroom, so he decided to establish the first residential school for the blind--the New England Asylum for the Blind--in 1829 (Noll, 2018, pp. 9-10; Holiday, 2013, p. 22). In particular, Howe's educational philosophy was that "each child who was blind must be considered an individual and be educated according to his or her interests and abilities" (Holiday, 2013, p. 23, as cited in Holbrook & Koenig, 2000). Within a few years, Howe established two other schools: the New York Institution for the Education of the Blind (now the New York Institute for Special Education) in 1830, and the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind (now the Overbrook School for the Blind) (Holiday, 2013, p. 22). "These three U.S. residential schools pioneered developments in education for the disabled" (Holiday, 2013, p. 22). After a law was passed in 1879 that required the American Printing House to reprint learning materials for BVI students in large print, there was an increase in BVI student registration at residential schools for the blind (Holiday, 2013, p. 22, as cited in Koestler, 2004). Until his death in 1876, Howe was a leader in the development of curricula and instruction at these residential schools (Holiday, 2013, p. 23).

Almost forty years later, the American Association of Instructors of the Blind (AAIB) was established to work with school administrators and teachers across the country to make sure that residential schools provided affordable education to students, adequate programs that allowed BVI students to compete academically against each other, learn useful skills to achieve paid employment, and integrate into society after developing basic knowledge and skills (Holiday, 2013, p. 23, as cited in Altenbaugh, 1999). Likewise, the establishment of residential schools for the blind helped diminish racism against students of color with disabilities, as historically, Black and Brown BVI students did not attend public or private schools. Hence, the establishments of these 'non-regular' schools for disabled students "prompted the inclusion of individuals who were not formally schooled" for the first time (Holiday, 2013, p. 25, as cited in Altenbaugh, 1999). Even back then, though, residential schools for the blind were not without criticism, as some people thought the education attained there was not holistic and lacked socialization opportunities for BVI students both inside and outside of the classroom when they re-entered society as adults (Holiday, 2013, p. 25).

It is evident that "Throughout history, there has been an attempt to educate the blind," although questions remain about the specific curricula BVI students are taught, and where they receive it: at a regular school or a separate (residential) school (Holiday, 2013, p. 29). With the passing of the IDEA Act in 1975 and the ADA Act in 1990, disabled students were now entitled to a free education in accessible buildings. By law, K-12 public schools are required to identify students as early as possible that might have an impairment or disability and provide them appropriate and sufficient learning resources like assistive technologies/devices (ATD) inside and/or outside of school; access to the general core curriculum, adequate transportation to/from school; and other accommodations as determined by an IEP Team that works closely with the student, parent/caregiver(s), school administration, and outside (community) staff (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2018; Assistance for Education of All Children with Disabilities, 2004). Specifically for BVI students, they have the right to receive Braille instruction and the use of Braille if determined by their IEP team, and the right to accessible instructional materials provided by the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard, which converts materials into different formats such as HTML or text-to-speech to be read via an electronic device (Assistance for Education of All Children with Disabilities, 2004; National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standards, n.d.). As certified instructional staff members, school librarians can take part in attending IEP meetings and speaking with exceptional children teachers about the kind(s) of resources the library could acquire (such as large print or sensory devices) to best support disabled students.

Types of Blind/Visually Impaired Curriculum

The history of disability education in the U.S. relates to the types of unique curriculum BVI students are legally expected to receive throughout their K-12 education.

In their dissertation about curriculum development at three residential schools for the blind after the enactment of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001, Holiday (2013, p. 37) states there are several definitions of the term *curriculum*:

> Fundamentally, a curriculum consists of a list of the topics or subject matter that will be covered throughout the course of a program. [...] [The] curriculum determines the set of goals that shape the kinds of life-changing activities that the students will learn during the instructional process. The curriculum is also a reflection of the strengths, weaknesses, behavior, and needs of the students. In addition, the curriculum contains standards or "what students should know and be able to do" – "and it sets the goals for instruction".

Holiday notes that problems arise when one considers the definition of the general education curriculum, which varies by individual school systems and state requirements. *General education curriculum* includes classes such as English/Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, Health/Physical Education (PE), Social Studies, and History. As of 2010, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) was implemented across the country to set a baseline for ELA and Mathematics curriculum. According to Hatlen (2007, para. 12), this type of curriculum is defined as "the knowledge and skills expected to be learned by a student by high school graduation". BVI students obviously have unique needs that must be met outside of the general core curriculum due to the severity of their vision impairment, so they receive extra educational support through the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC). Today, the ECC remains "the foundation for how students who are blind and visually impaired are educated in the U.S." (Holiday, 2013, p. 41). Whether BVI students are enrolled at a public school or residential school, ECC curriculum serves to instruct them on developing their knowledge of things pertinent to living a successful, healthy, and happy adult life as a disabled individual. There are nine ECC topics that should be covered throughout a BVI student's K-12 education: "assistive technology, career education, compensatory/access skills, independent living, orientation and mobility, recreation and leisure, self-determination, sensory efficiency, and social interaction" (Hatlen, 2007, para. 22).

As of data collected in January 2016 by the American Printing House for the Blind, there is a significantly larger amount of BVI students (ages 3-21) attending public schools than residential schools for the blind. They found that 84% of students are registered with their state's department of education; 8% are registered at residential schools for the blind; 6% are registered at rehabilitation programs; and 2% are registered with multiple disability programs (American Foundation for the Blind, 2018). The amount of BVI students attending public schools shows a positive increase in the overall education of disabled students in the U.S. as BVI students are able to converse, learn, and grow alongside their nondisabled peers in the 'least restrictive environment' where they have equal access to the general core curriculum alongside the expanded core curriculum (ECC) they receive through outside educators like Teachers of the Blind/Visually Impaired (TBVI) and Orientation and Mobility (O&M) specialists, as delegated by their individual IEPs. As Hatlen (2007, para. 44) emphasizes, "All students with visual impairments, including those with additional disabilities, have a fundamental right to an expanded core curriculum that emphasizes the students' opportunities to be equal and the right to be different". While there exist larger problems within the overall educational system in the U.S., measurable strides have been taken to make sure the 21st century learning environment is equitable and inclusive for those who have learning differences, including the texts and instruction provided in the school library/media center, and whether services are provided via pushing-in or pulling-out the student for independent instruction. Unfortunately, if accurate representations of blindness/vision impairment are not available in school library collections, students cannot learn the valid history of disability and the diverse ways disabled students learn, which I discuss in detail below.

Why Disability Representation Matters in School Library Collections

Increasingly, American schools are becoming a "melting pot" of different races, cultures, languages, and abilities. By 2050, Passel and Cohn (2008) from the PEW Research Center estimate that 1 in 5 Americans (19%) will be an immigrant, the Latino population will "triple in size" to 29%, and Blacks and Asian racial/ethnic groups will increase to 13% and 9%, respectively. With the total amount of citizens increasing, it is imperative for school library collections to anticipate these changes. This includes providing texts featuring characters from diverse backgrounds and life experiences, including disability. While it is unclear how many people living in the U.S. by 2050 will identify as having a disability, all children deserve to see themselves reflected in the literature they consume on a daily basis, especially in school library collections. Courtney (2019, p. 133) writes that "Schools have both a professional and a moral responsibility to ensure they offer diverse texts to their pupils through school libraries," especially texts that feature characters from traditionally disadvantaged backgrounds. For children who are from a disadvantaged background such as children with disabilities, if these texts are *not* present in the library, the library can seem as a cold, unwelcoming, and insensitive place where these children's differences are not celebrated, heard, or valued. This limits the encounters for disabled students and nondisabled students to learn about differences, grow in empathy and understanding of one another's experiences, and further separates the able-bodies from the disabled-bodies. In other words, it sends a message to minority children that their voice does not (or will not ever) matter as much as the majority voice.

For many children and young adults with a disability, "the feeling of being totally and completely alone--the only one facing a specific set of challenges--is overwhelming" (Wopperer, 2011, p. 26). Author Christina Minaki, born with Cerebral Palsy, opens an essay about the need to authentically represent disability in the fictional world by sharing her experience of reading Jean Little, which helped ease the feeling of being alone. In Jean Little's books, Minaki was able to "look for herself" in the pages, as these books "represented the beginning of an understanding that disability is not the kiss of death" in a world where Minaki otherwise heard excuses for "a society clearly not welcoming to disability"--the same society that said "you are not welcome here" (Minaki, 2009, p. 12). After she graduated with her first master's degree in 2004, Minaki (2009, p. 13) fought with herself about writing a children's book featuring a disabled character:

> I knew that young readers needed more literature covering the theme of disability in an empowering way. I also knew that I was well placed to tackle that subject. [...] I spent a long time preoccupied with wanting to release fiction that set me apart from being dismissed as a "predictable" writer with a disability—one with yet another story of "courage and longsuffering"—to tell. [...] Eventually, it hit me that if I wanted to avoid being seen as "courageous" for the wrong reasons, the solution is to use my writing as a vehicle of my activism, to portray the lives of people with disabilities as lives lived by people of purpose, dignity, resilience and focus.

Personally, I applaud Minaki's ability to be honest with how she felt as she began her journey as a disabled author, as this requires courage to share something personal to a wider audience. Within these few paragraphs, it is evident that Minaki was brightly aware of the need for children to see themselves reflected in literature that empowered disability, yet unsure how to approach such a topic as she did not want to be seen as just another disabled author with her “pity me” story. But disability does not have to be “normalized”; it is the rest of the world that needs to normalize to what *we* need and how we are as (dis)abled bodies.

Minaki’s example indicates the power that counter-stories can have on our minds and hearts if they are added to school library collections. In her article about how multicultural young adult literature can act as a form of counter-storytelling, Hughes-Hassell (2013, p. 215) cites Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso’s definition of counter-storytelling: “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told.” Counter-stories allow the reader to “cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority,” and offer a chance to “help us understand what life is like for others, and invite[s] the reader into a new and unfamiliar world” (Hughes-Hassell, 2013, pp. 215-216, as cited in Delgado & Stefanic, 1995; and Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). Counter-storytelling aligns with scholar Rudine Sims Bishop’s idea of literature acting as mirrors, windows, and sliding-glass doors into which readers can see themselves, view others’ experiences, and experience others’ lives through reading. Bishop first presented her metaphor in summer 1990 in an article she published in the journal *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom.* As Bishop (1990, para. 1) concisely describes,

> Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers only have to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror.

Bishop goes on to elaborate that children from majority groups such as White children have always been able to see their “mirrors” or identities in books, yet children from minority groups like Black and Brown children have missed out on this experiences; hence, the call for literature to represent students from all backgrounds and experiences, rather than the background and experiences from a select privileged few. Bishop (1990, para. 4) cautions that

> When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part.

This statement echoes Christina Minaki's search for herself in the literature she read as a child, along with my own search, and that of another author, Grace Lin. Lin is a renowned author of color who has published several children's books that are based on her experiences growing up in a Chinese American family in upstate New York, such as *Where The Mountain Meets the Moon* (2010) and *Dim Sum for Everyone!* (2003). Like Minaki, Lin has spoken about Bishop's idea, most notably in a TED Talk she gave in 2016. In the video, Lin explains how she was one of the only Asian families in her town as a child, in fact the only Asian in her elementary school. As an avid reader, Lin remembers feeling like there was no one that looked like her in any of the media she consumed, like movies, TV, and magazines. She states, "Most importantly, there was nobody that looked like me in the books that I loved" (Lin, 2016, 2:35-2:53).

In fact, the only book Lin remembers seeing herself in was a book called *The Five Chinese Brothers,* both written and illustrated by White authors. One day, when her elementary school librarian told the class they would be reading this book, Lin recalls how everyone in the class turned to look at her and said, "Chinese! Just like you!" (Lin, 2016, 3:07-3:39). Lin acknowledges how embarrassed and hurt she was every time someone reminded her of the ethnicity she tried so hard to ignore. At the end of her talk, Lin encourages the audience to take a look at their children’s bookshelves to see if the books there are all mirrors or windows so that children can understand people that are different than them, build empathy, and to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences with each other, even sometimes when it is difficult or uncomfortable as that is when change really happens.

Especially for schools where students do not have as many (or any) opportunities to access books or materials outside of school at another space like a public library or community center, the school library takes on that much more responsibility in filling these gaps. Adolescence is an exhausting period for all students, full of many ups-and-downs and emotions that change day-by-day as quickly as the temperature changes. Adolescence can even be traumatic for some students if they already feel Othered due to being “different” in some way than the majority of their classmates, have a harmful experience happen to them, experience the loss or death of a loved one, or are dealing with mental health issues. Therefore, maintaining a library space where all students feel safe, brave, and welcome is the first step in creating opportunities for Positive Identity Development (PID) to occur through reading.

Positive Identity Development (PID) relates to how one sees themselves in the world around them. One’s identity is shaped by the individual themselves and also the relationships and experiences they have with others, along with other aspects relevant to their overall identity like their culture, ability, socioeconomic status, etc. For years, scholars in psychology have worked to define what identity is. These explanations range from identity meaning “personal goals, beliefs, and values” to “self-esteem and reflexive self-evaluations” and even one’s “unique and overarching life story” (Spaeth, 2012, p. 5, as cited in Marcia, 1966; Waterman, 1999; Kernis et al., 2008; and McAdams et al., 2006). Particularly to encourage self-esteem, diverse literature is beneficial for school library collections as they provide these mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors for students to see themselves, their experiences, and others' experiences that they may not otherwise have outside of school. Students can also identify their personal goals, beliefs, and values through literature, and change the course of their "overarching life story" forever. Along with providing culturally competent literature, PID can happen in school libraries by hosting connected-learning, outcomes-based programs; collaborating with teachers or outside community partners; and truly listening to what students want, need, or hope for in the library, programs/events hosted by the library, and the collection itself.

There are other benefits for providing literature featuring characters with disabilities in school library collections. A study conducted by Emiliano Ayala in 1999 found that this type of literature can be used to "[help] children understand and cope with difficult decisions they must face in an increasingly complex society"; draw students into reading "relevant, authentic publications" of disabled people; have access to literature that "increasingly reflect[s]" disabled people in our society; and provide comedic relief and "reflection of self" for those living with a disability (Irwin & Moeller, 2010, pp. 1-2, as cited in Ayala, 1999). This echoes Wopperer's (2011, p. 28) statement of how disabled children and teens can develop a habit of life-long reading and "personal power" when they read a book featuring a character like them. Similarly, Colvin (2017) describes how reading diverse literature does more than provide a new perspective for readers to understand, it can also provide a safe space for exploration and can act as the catalyst for one's change in behavior. This evidence shows how diverse literature can aid in dismantling stereotypes, misunderstandings, and inherent bias about disability in our society.

Furthermore, these texts can provide bibliotherapy for readers. Bibliotherapy is an idea I first came across in Jennie Catherine Minor’s master’s thesis from UNC-Chapel Hill on which she wrote about portrayals of characters with multiple sclerosis in adult fiction. I decided to do a search for bibliotherapy in young adult literature and was surprised by what I found. Authors Kurtts and Gavigan (2008, p. 23) explain that “Bibliotherapy is the process of using literature in therapeutic ways”. Kurtts and Gavigan (2008, p. 23) call on educators to use children’s literature to “share powerful examples of how we all may or may not relate to individual differences”. This is especially pertinent for understanding how disability impacts one’s life and those they are close to, and the emotions and thoughts that come with being in that kind of position. In my opinion, bibliotherapy should be embraced by educators as it is another way for educators and students alike--disabled and nondisabled, majority and minority groups--to look into the “window” of someone else’s world or slide open that glass door and step right into it. In this sense, disability literature provides nondisabled readers the chance to observe and identify what it is like to have a certain (or multiple) disabilities, while disability literature provides disabled readers a sense of comfort, strength, and identity in seeing an aspect of themselves that has been traditionally marginalized in society. Especially for books that deal with blind/visually impaired characters, these books can educate the greater world about the ‘borderland’ BVI people live in, as the loss of eyesight itself is complex and unique to each individual who identifies as having a vision impairment.

As Courtney (2019) stated above, school librarians have moral and professional responsibilities when it comes to providing diverse texts for their students. According to the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), the governing body of K-12 school librarians in the United States, there is a common belief of the school library being a “unique and essential part of a learning community” that is committed to values of diversity, equity, and inclusion to ensure that *all* students are prepared for college, career, and life upon high school graduation (American Association of School Librarians, n.d.). Learners should also have the right to engage in intellectual freedom, “to speak and hear what others have to say, rather than allowing others to control their access to ideas and information” (American Association of School Librarians, n.d.). On the librarian’s end, this means cultivating a library collection that is inclusive and accessible to all students and creating a space where learners can speak for themselves and listen to others’ stories. On the learners’ end, this means learners must be excited and willing to engage with these materials--to truly look into those mirrors, through those windows, or open those sliding glass doors--to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for books featuring characters and life experiences that are different than their own.

In particular for school librarians in North Carolina--termed *school library media coordinators*--one goal of being an effective school library media coordinator is to “build a learning environment that meets the instructional needs of a diverse population of students” (North Carolina Public Schools, 2013, p. 7). This includes librarians exercising “professional judgment in selecting resources that reflect the diverse developmental, cultural, social, and linguistic needs of students,” equitable access to instructional technologies, and more (North Carolina Public Schools, 2013, p. 8). For me, it is easy to see where providing diverse literature fits into the equation as I believe this type of learning environment cannot be built or sustained if one does not closely examine who is and who is not represented on the shelves, including those students with disabilities or students who know someone who experienced or currently is experiencing a disability or impairment. In my opinion, having this literature in the collection does more than provide mirrors for disabled students to see themselves or give them a sense of belonging or safety; it opens the curtain covering the window for others to look through, empathize with, and engender new conversations, thoughts, and opinions about whose stories are worth telling and listening to.

The History of Disability Representation in Young Adult Literature

Historically, disabled people have been discriminated against, stigmatized, and oppressed in literature for as long as the printing press existed. These characterizations acted as mirrors of how society at large viewed disability at certain moments in time. Unfortunately, these characterizations have improved in recent years, but not by much. In fact, disability in literature appeared as early as Sophacle's *Oedipus Rex* (430 B.C.E.) and continues today into the 21st Century (Bowman & Jaeger, 2004, p. 45). Well-known disabled characters include Tiny Tim and the real-life Hellen Keller, often pitied for their disability or embraced for their triumph of *overcoming* their disability, which are both ableist viewpoints. "What you likely won't realize is the stereotypes that these characters have been fulfilling in the media for decades on end--disabled innocence (Tiny Tim) [and] disabled inspiration (Hellen Keller)" (Bowman & Jaeger, 2004, pp. 45-46).

One resource I found helpful for learning the history of disability representation in young adult literature is a master's thesis written by a previous student at UNC-Chapel

Hill, Caitlin E. Wilson. In 2012, Wilson completed a content analysis of juvenile picture books and young adult literature to examine how the representations of disability changed overtime through books published in either the decade 1980-1990 or 2000-2010. She mentions how the children's publishing industry spiked in the 1950-60s as adult books like *Catcher in the Ry*e and *The Outsiders* became popular with younger audiences (Wilson, 2012, p. 5, as cited in Owen, 2003).

When disability representation did "make it big" in the publishing industry in the 1970s, there was not much variety in terms of storyline, character development, or the character's disability itself. Literature featured things like "bland language" and "predictable plots" which did not aid in making the stories any more engaging or realistic (Wopperer, 2011, p. 28, as cited in Quicke, 1985). Up until the 1970s, only books featuring characters with physical disabilities were published. Over the next thirty years--perhaps in correlation with the passing of the IDEA Act in 1975 and the ADA Act in 1990--books featuring characters with a diverse range of disabilities slowly began to appear on bookshelves more frequently, for the first time featuring characters with emotional, mental, and learning disabilities whose disability was a central feature of the plotline. These books challenged the traditional descriptions of disabled characters in literature as "pale, puny, or deformed" as more authors sought to capture the 'reality' of disability in the twentieth-century world (Wopperer, 2011, p. 28). Overall, the brief history Wilson (2012) provides about disability in children's literature through her close examination of picture books and young adult books between 1980-1990 and 2000-2010 shows an increase in positive attitudes directed toward disability, though there is noticeable room for improvement in making disabled characters as realistic as possible in light of contemporary literature featuring disability stereotypes, inspiration porn, and modeling of disability.

Disability Stereotypes, Inspiration Porn, and Models of Disability

The quote from Bowman and Jaeger (2004, pp. 45-46) about Tiny Tim and Helen Keller acting out the “disabled innocence” and “disabled inspiration” stereotypes are just two of many stereotypes traditionally associated with disabled characters in the media. In 1987, researchers Rubin and Strauss Watson (para. 1) presented the idea of *disability bias*, which they defined as “the attitudes and practices that lead to unequal and unjust portrayals of people with disabilities in children's literature”. In their article, the authors cited ten common stereotypes written by Biklen and Bogdan in 1977, adding their own stereotype at the end (#11). The stereotypes below refer to how disabled characters are portrayed in literature, and to a greater extent, media itself:

1. Person with a disability portrayed as pitiable and pathetic.
2. Person with a disability as the object of violence.
3. Person with a disability as sinister and/or evil.
4. Person with a disability used as "atmosphere."
5. Person with a disability as "super crip."
6. Person with a disability as laughable.
7. Person with a disability as his/her own--and only--worst enemy.
8. Person with a disability as a burden.
9. Person with a disability as asexual.
10. Person with a disability as incapable of fully participating in everyday life.
11. Person with a disability as being isolated from disabled and nondisabled peers (Rubin & Strauss Watson, 1987, para. 3-13).

Unfortunately, these stereotypes are seen in popular literature today, ranging from picture books to chapter books (middle grade), and even into the young adult and adult genres. Without being aware of these stereotypes’ existence, a nondisabled reader might not recognize their harmful implications or confront their misleading aspects off the page.

In finding research for this part of my literature review, I looked at another master's paper by a previous UNC-Chapel Hill student, Vanessa C. Shortley. Like Wilson (2012), Shortley completed a critical content analysis in 2018 of ten total middle grade and young adult novels featuring disabled characters, analyzing the ableist language and disability representations found in these texts. One middle grade text Shortley analyzed was *Wonder*; another title was *Everything, Everything.* Both books are fairly recent, having been published within the past decade (2010 or later), and both have received critical acclaim and even movie adaptations. *Wonder* is about a ten-year-old boy Auggie who was born with a facial deformity. In the novel, Auggie is bullied by his new classmates, and toward the end of the novel, he is awarded a prize "simply for existing" (Shortley, 2018, p. 63). This demonstrates Biklen and Bogdan's stereotypes 1, 2, and 5 (portrayed as pitiable and pathetic; object of violence; and being a "super crip"). Similarly, in *Everything, Everything,* Shortley notes how the main character, Maddy--perceived as having an immunodeficiency which makes her allergic to everything--feels like she is a burden to her caregiver mother, and like her life is not worth fully living if she cannot do the activities nondisabled people can do (Shortley, 2018, pp. 64-66). Likewise, this demonstrates Biklen and Bogdan's stereotypes 8, 10, and 11 (feeling like a burden; not being able to participate in daily life activities; and being isolated from her nondisabled peers, as Maddy's mother forbids her from leaving the house).

Clearly, Shortley's (2018) examples show how there are still critical problems that need to be addressed by authors, librarians, and publishers alike in the accurate representation of disabled characters. Interestingly, Dunn (2015) explains how disability in YA literature is the least likely to be critically examined by educators and readers.

Dunn (2015, p. 2) discusses how disabled characters can be viewed through two lenses: a "good" lens because they "challenge or "disable" myths about disability," and the "bad" lens because disabled characters are stereotypically portrayed, dies or receives a cure for their disability by the end of the text, or the text itself does not challenge remarks about the ableist society we live in. Either way, both of these views pose harmful threats to disabled people in real life as they perpetuate or refrain from confronting the inherent stereotypes and ableist views of disabled people in our able-bodied society.

Related to disability stereotypes is the idea of inspiration porn. The late disability activist and comedian, Stella Young (2012, para. 4), describes inspiration porn as

> an image of a person with a disability, often a kid, doing something completely ordinary--like playing, or talking, or running, or drawing a picture, or hitting a tennis ball--carrying a caption like "your excuse is invalid" or "before you quit, try".

While Young is strictly referring to the inspiration porn that appears on widely-shared Web photographs--such as a little girl smiling next to Oscar Pistorious, a South African Paralympian, with the caption, "The only disability in life is a bad attitude" splayed across the image--this definition can be applied to portrayals of disability in literature. In their article, *The problem with inspiration porn: A tentative definition and a provisional critique*, Grue (2016, p. 2) explains the three ideologies Young advocated against: the objectification, devaluation, and individualization and mystification of disabled people/bodies. Objectification refers to the disabled individual (body) being seen as an "object" rather than a "subject" by the (assumed) nondisabled audience. Likewise, devaluation refers to the "commonplace acts" disabled people (bodies) do on a daily basis, such as walking on prosthetic legs, which is given more appraisal than necessary by nondisabled people (as, arguably, everyone "can" move in one way or another--people just have different modes of doing the same exact activities or achieving the same results). Lastly, individualization and mystification refer to a focus on one's "visible impairment and physical prowess," framing disability as an individual problem that can be solved through the disabled individual's (body's) hard work and dedication. (Via this frame, the Nike slogan, "Just do it," comes to mind.) Evidently, this puts the blame on the individual (body) to resolve themselves of their disability rather than addressing the larger systemic, societal issues of disability oppression (Grue, 2016, p. 2). While I believe it is great that disabled people are appearing more often--and perhaps accurately--in the daily media we consume, we have to be critical of how they are really being portrayed.

This relates to the two models society has used to view disability over the past several hundred years, the social model and the medical model. Like it sounds, the social model of disability refers to the existing societal structures and barriers in place that hinder one's ability to access resources or support (Hughes, 2010, p. 509). The social model puts the blame on society for disabling a person, not that person's own disability or impairment (Hughes, 2010, p. 509). Within this model, Hughes (2010, p. 509) explains how distinctions should be made between disability and impairment, defining impairment as "a long-term characteristic of an individual that affects their body, mind or senses" while a disability is "a result of exclusion because of the barriers society puts in the way" (Hughes, 2010, p. 509). For example, a person with dementia might have trouble remembering certain events, while there exist "disabling attitudes" in society in which some people believe disabled people cannot do the same things or enjoy life as much as their non-disabled peers because of their perceived lack of ability (Hughes, 2010, p. 509). Conversely, the medical model views one's disability as the main problem and puts responsibility on the person to adjust their living condition. While useful for diagnoses and receiving accommodations, this model "thereby negates individuals to a collection of symptoms or provides an unfair focus on what people cannot do" (Hughes, 2010, p. 509). For the purpose of this paper, I will be viewing these characters' disabilities through the social model, though I am aware that authors might be unaware of these viewpoints and have described these characters via the medical model.

This broad discussion of stereotypes, inspiration porn, and ways of modeling disability in society leads into my final point about the continued (mis)representation of disabled characters--particularly blind/visually impaired characters--in young adult literature today.

The (Mis)Representation of Blind/Visually Impaired Characters in Young Adult Literature Today

In contemporary literature, Dunn (2015, p. 21) observes that "Young adult novels about protagonists with disabilities are becoming fairly common" in the greater canon. Indeed, the amount of diversity representation overall in literature has steadily increased over the past fifty years, though there is still a large hill to climb. One organization dedicated to this climb is The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC), based at The University of Wisconsin-Madison. Every year, the CCBC publishes a report in which they present publishing statistics about multicultural books by and about authors of color, including authors who identify as Latino/a, African American, Asian American, and First Nation. Their results from U.S. publishers in 2018 show a disparity between the amount of people of color authors and those who actually write and illustrate the books. For example, the total amount of books received by CCBC in 2018 was 3,312, with 388 books about African Americans and only 192 of these were written by African

Americans (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2019). Regarding disability representation, I believe the Cooperative Children's Book Center is a great indicator of the values and beliefs of the publishing industry as a whole, as their results bring up the questions of who is telling our stories, and whose stories get to be told.

Within the past 20 years, there have been efforts to increase awareness and publication of disability in children's and young adult literature. Specifically, the Schneider Family Book Award is given every year by the American Library Association to "honor authors or illustrators for a book that embodies an artistic expression of the disability experience for child and adolescent audiences" (American Library Association, n.d.). These books range from picture books to middle grade to young adult. Most recent Schneider Family Award winners (2020) are *Just Ask!* by Sonia Sotomayor (children's), *Song for A Whale* by Lynne Kelly (middle grade) and *Cursed* by Karol Ruth Silverstein. The Schneider Family Book Award was endowed by Dr. Katherine Schneider, the first blind girl to graduate from the Kalamazoo, Michigan public school system, and her family in 2003 (Admin, 2014, para. 2). To qualify for an award, the book must portray some aspect of living with a disability, whether the disability is physical, mental, or emotional (Schneider Family Book Award Manual, 2004, p. 5). Interestingly, the award has been given 64 times since its first debut season in 2004, yet I found after a simple Google search that only 7 books featured a prominent character who is blind/visually impaired. Why such a disparity, I wondered, when the award had been created by a blind woman herself?

The answer to this question appears to be two-fold. The first answer is that there are not as many children's or young adult books being published featuring blind/visually impaired (BVI) characters as much as there are literature featuring other physical, emotional, and cognitive disabilities. The second reason is that there is a lack of disabled authors writing books featuring disabled characters. As Dunn (2015, p. 22) notes, "young adult novels that feature *both* a protagonist and an author with a disability are still rare" in the years following social justice movements like Own Voices and We Need Diverse Books. Even if young adult books *are* being published with BVI characters in them, they may not be one of the main characters or protagonists in the storyline, the portrayal of disability may be stereotypical or unrealistic, and the disabled characters themselves may appear flat and one-dimensional instead of multi-faceted. Another issue is that ableist language or beliefs can weave themselves into the story--from the dialogue to the character descriptions to the characters' actions themselves--without the author or readers noticing if we do not know where or how to look for it. Thus, the cycle of disability (mis)representation starts all over again.

During my literature review, I did find some authors asking these necessary questions about blindness/visual impairment representation in children's and young adult literature in the early 1990s and into the 2000s. The first author is Annette B. Heim, who published a short article, *Beyond the Stereotypes: Characters with Mental Disabilities in Children's Books,* in the September 1994 issue of *School Library Journal.* While Heim only looked at books featuring characters with mental disabilities--she chose this specific disability because her son has a mental disability--she established five criteria for evaluating mental disabilities for their authentic representations of disability, family, friendship, and community, which I believe are still relevant in evaluating disability representation nearly 30 years later.

The first criteria Heim (1994, p. 139) defined was the “accuracy of information,” explaining how the information presented in the story, including the diagnosis, research, and language used, should try to be as medically and socially accurate as possible. The next criteria was “lack of stereotypes,” specifically how a book should “provide insight into the feelings and thoughts of [...] disabled characters *themselves*, rather than using disabled characters as literary archetypes to provoke certain thoughts and feelings in *ourselves*,” as research covered in this literature review has presented how stereotypes harmful (Heim, 1994, p. 139). These criteria also place emphasis on disability texts acting as counter stories as we can take a peek into the viewpoint of a disabled character instead of projecting our own viewpoints onto them.

Heim’s remaining criteria are about the quality of the story, disability confrontation, and the role disabled characters play in the overarching storyline. According to Heim, the book should have a rich plotline, character development, and other literary elements that make a book good and enjoyable to its reader. “Being “about” something”--such as disability--”cannot excuse a poorly written book” (Heim, 1994, p. 139). Furthermore, Heim’s (1994, p. 139) fourth criteria is that books should seek to confront the disability they portray sensibly, including “manifestation of the disability that a child would be likely to experience in real life”--this is when medically accurate research comes into play. Likewise, just because a book is about a character with a disability, that does not mean the entire book has to revolve around the disability itself--disabled children and their nondisabled peers typically have the same problems, wants, and needs; they may just express their wants and needs differently. Advises Constance Mellon (Heim, 1994, p. 140, as cited by Mellon, 1989), “The best approach to disability in juvenile books is one in which aspects of the disability are revealed, not as the main focus of the book, but through the unfolding of a story." Finally, Heim (1994, p. 140) cautions that books should not "use" disabled characters. Through her content analysis, she observed how

> many children's books use a character who is mentally disabled primarily as a vehicle for the growth of another character who is "normal". By the end of the story, the "normal" character usually "gains sensitivity or awareness because of the relationship he or she has with the "abnormal" character.

As Heim suggests, the biggest problem with disabled characters being "used" in some way for the growth of another character is that it perpetuates the stigma against disabled people in our society that they are not considered as useful or unique as others are because of the physical, mental, or emotional limitation(s) they have.

Throughout the rest of the article, Heim provided six novels published since 1984 that she identified as exemplary in their portrayal of mental disability. She divided the books into three subgroups: family, friends, and community. All youth can recognize the importance of these subgroups as they are figuring out their identities within these conflicting--and sometimes conflating--contexts. Heim (1994, p. 141) describes how families can be a source of "nurturing and comfort one day, a hotbed of conflict the next". I personally remember my adolescence as a time of joy, anger, and confusion, as I was trying to negotiate the development of my own identity and my wants and needs which sometimes clashed with what my parents or friends expected of me. Similarly, lots of children are eager to make new friends, and need a supportive network of peers that lets them be who they are without repercussions from others in places of authority like parents or teachers. Lastly, communities can provide resources, relationships, and other types of support that allow disabled people to fully participate in life and contribute to the well-being of society. Heim (1994, p. 142) concludes by stating how she would like to see more books "written and shared" about disability in order to make the "unknown known," "to see the joys, the sorrows, the challenges, and the desires of mentally disabled children illuminated and revealed, so that readers might get to know them beyond the stereotypes."

In 2000, authors Pamela S. Carroll and L. Penny Rosenblum did just that as they applied Heim's criteria in the evaluation of blind/visually impaired characters in their article, "Through Their Eyes: Are Characters with Visual Impairment Portrayed Realistically in Young Adult Literature?" This paper served as the inspiration for my master's paper as I was curious what this representation looked like 20 years after the article's original publication as disability in publication has increased. Carroll and Penny Rosenblum also identified new criteria for teachers, parents, school library media specialists, and others influential in collection development processes for school library collections. In their discussion about previous research, Carroll and Penny Rosenblum (2000, p. 622) acknowledge the similar problems I had when conducting research about blindness/vision impairment:

> We were [...] unable to locate studies that give specific emphasis to the portrayal of characters in YAL [young adult literature] who have vision problems. This lack most likely stems [...] from the miniscule number of recent young adult books available in which there is a main character with a visual impairment.

While they did find that research was being conducted about disabled characters in general, the portrayals varied significantly in terms of unrealistic to realistic. The authors presented examples such as Beverly Butler's *Light a Single Candle* (1970) in which the main character, Cathy, accommodates well to her new blindness; Sally Hobart Alexander's *Taking Hold: My Journey Into Blindness*, an autobiographical account of the author struggling with her emotions and new disability; and the character Muffin in Sharon Bell Mathis' *Listen for the Fig Tree* (1974), who shows the reader how BVI people accomplish daily life activities. Another notable mention is Edward Bloor's *Tangerine* (1997) in which the main character, Paul, defies stereotypes of what it means to be blind (such as teens with vision problems being inactive and unwilling to venture outside alone); and Theodore Taylor's (1987) *The Cay*, in which a young boy, Phillip, suddenly becomes blind after being struck on the head during a shipwreck, and must learn how to survive on a deserted island with another boy, Timothy.

After providing these examples, the authors explain how, despite these texts featuring BVI main characters, there is no guarantee these books will provide "accurate and reliable information" about how life is actually like with a vision impairment (Carroll & Penny Rosenblum, 2000, p. 625). These books may present a "back-to-normal" theme in which the character's disability is mediated by the end of the novel through surgery, medication, or another type of intervention, which presents the idea of blind characters only having a "happy ending" once they no longer have a disability (Carroll & Penny Rosenblum, 2000, p. 625). This message can communicate false hope to BVI adolescents and their peers that blindness or visual impairments can be "cured" somehow. Also, the character's use of assistive technologies/devices such as guide dogs could present false information to the reader about how guide dogs are the only way for BVI people to become independent, functioning adults, and that guide dogs can take a person anywhere in the world with just a simple command, akin to Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz* tapping her ruby red slippers together and instantly teleporting back to Kansas; when in fact, there is an entire legal, emotional, and monetary process one has to go through in order to even consider whether or not to obtain a guide dog.

Carroll and Penny Rosenblum mention all of this information to illustrate how necessary it is for educators, such as school librarians, to ask certain questions when deciding what books to add to their collection that positively and accurately feature blind/visually impaired characters, and the potential effect of this missing criteria on a reader's idea of what it means to live as a blind/visually impaired person in the 21st century. While not every book will meet each criterion as no book is perfect, they are nonetheless important to consider. The seven questions are:

> 1. Does the book have characters with congenital and adventitious sight loss? Does it have both characters with low vision and who are blind? If it does not, readers may erroneously believe that all of those who have impairments have acquired them after having sight, at least for some time.
> 2. Does the book have a character with low vision? If not, student readers may mistakenly believe that all people with visual impairments are functionally blind.
> 3. Does the book have characters who attend public school and have contemporary teenage experiences (e.g., with dating and sexual pressure, family problems, drugs and alcohol, violence, poverty)? Since 90% of children and adolescents with visual impairment are in public schools (Corn, Bisa, & DePriest, 1995), it is important for these characters to have experiences that typical adolescents face.
> 4. Does the book have characters who are facing issues specific to teenagers with visual impairments in the 21st century, such as being non-drivers in a society where driving symbolizes independence and entrance to adulthood? Adolescents with visual impairments need realistic role models with whom they can identify, even in literature.
> 5. Does the story resolution involve a cure for the visual impairment, with the implication that in order to be normal, happy, and independent, one must be sighted? If it does, the book may lead a student reader to develop the belief that one cannot be normal unless a visual impairment is cured.
> 6. Do the families and peers of the character with visual impairment act realistically toward that character? Occasional fear, anger, and questioning are normal not only for the character who has a disability, but for other characters in that character's life.
> 7. Do the families and teachers expect the character with visual impairment to be a successful independent person? Of people with visual impairments,

> 70% are unemployed. Student readers need to meet characters with visual impairment who are successful and independent as adolescents. They need to believe that these characters will become successful adults (Carroll & Penny Rosenblum, 2000, p. 626).

Similar to Heim's 1994 content analysis, in the second half of their article, Carroll and Penny Rosenblum applied these seven criteria to the main character Jocelyn in Isabelle Holland's *The Unfrightened Dark* (1996) and the main character Paul in Edward Bloor's *Tangerine* (1997). They used a 3-point scale to determine how realistic each of these criteria were, (1) being poor representation, (2) being adequate representation, and (3) being excellent representation. Overall, the authors found that Jocelyn's character was less realistic than Paul in terms of her vision impairment (1) and having low vision (1) (she is totally blind because of an accident when she was 10). On the other hand, Paul was less realistic in how the other characters in the book treated him (1) (for example, the reader does not see Paul experience any type of special instruction for his vision impairment at school), and Paul receives the same expectations from others as his sighted peers (1). Positives are that both characters attend public school (3), they face issues specific to their vision impairment (like frustration with having vision loss) (2), and vision impairments are important, though not essential, aspects to the overall plotlines (Jocelyn's is 2, and Paul's is 3). The authors included these evaluations to show how two sets of criteria can be used to evaluate the realist representations of blind/visually impaired characters, in the hopes that "these criteria will be useful to all who evaluate young adult literature as well as to YA authors as they develop characters for their stories" (Carroll & Penny Rosenblum, 2000, pp. 627-628).

Besides Carroll and Penny Rosenblum's analysis, I was not in luck to find other recent articles (i.e., 2000 or later) that only analyzed portrayals of blind/visually impaired characters in young adult literature. For example, my searches for “blindness or visual impairment or vision loss” and “young adult literature” in the Library and Information Science Source (LISS) database only returned three results, two of which were reviews about books with disabled characters, one being a blind character and the other a character with dyslexia. When I broadened the search to just “blindness or visual impairment or vision loss” and “literature,” the results quickly became unrelated to my research questions. Narrowing this search to “blindness or visual impairment or vision loss” and “children’s literature” like the first search returned fifteen results, almost all of them reviews about children’s books featuring blind/visually impaired characters. While a marginal improvement, this was not what I was looking for, so I found myself getting quite creative with my search terms. Likewise, the published master’s papers I consulted for guidance in writing this literature review--such as Minor (2011), Wilson (2012), and Shortley (2018)--were very helpful in understanding topics related to disability such as disability stereotypes, the history of disability in children’s literature, and how to conduct a critical content analysis, although none of these papers centered on the specific disability of blindness/visual impairment.

Hence, this thesis seeks to fill a gap in the existing literature about the representations of blind/visually impaired main characters in young adult literature, as I believe there is much left to be discovered related to this specific disability and its continued (mis)representation in young adult literature today. In my opinion, if school librarians do not know about these kinds of books existing--or even care for their existence in the library in the first place--it does a disservice to students who are blind/visually impaired or who know or love someone with this disability because students are not provided those mirrors, doors, or windows to learn or see themselves reflected in these experiences. Furthermore, these texts cannot be utilized for bibliotherapeutic purposes by teachers and students if they are not on school library shelves, and public librarians and other institutions do not know to fill these gaps in their own collections if they assume the school library has these gaps covered. Every day across the country, student body populations are becoming more diverse, including diversity in ability, and school library budgets are unfortunately dwindling; thus, the necessity for carefully evaluating every item that goes into or is removed from the collection. Personally, I believe we cannot work toward dismantling harmful stereotypes and ableist language in our society if we do not have literature in our school library collections that authentically and realistically promotes disability in a positive light, that we can teach with, learn from, and grow with.

As I have explained through this literature review, disability--especially blindness/visual impairment--is complex in terms of diagnosis, history, and its past and present (mis)representation in young adult literature. Disability continues to be marginalized in our society along with other forms of oppression like race, gender, or sexual orientation. Disability is traditionally an experience only understood by those who have personally lived it. However, through careful consideration by school librarians, realistic, honest portrayals of disabled characters can be curated into school library collections at the same rates as the newest manga book or fantasy series. As the percentage of students enrolled in secondary schools continue to increase with each passing year, more students with visible or invisible (hidden) disabilities will become part of that equation. At this point, we should be extremely critical of how disabled characters are *really* being portrayed: As lively, authentic characters, where their disability is just one part of their identity? Or as characters who evoke pity, disgust, and are “used” to support a nondisabled character’s personal growth through the presentation of stereotypes and ableist language?

Key Terms and Theories

In this section, I define key terms and theories relevant and influential to my critical content analysis and my personal and professional beliefs as a twenty-first century LIS professional and educator. The first and second sections discuss the difference between the terms *disability* and *impairment*, and person-first language (PFL) versus identity first-language (IFL). The remaining sections explain what critical disability studies, intersectionality, and critical literacy are. I also define *Ableism* and provide examples of ableist language that may appear in the literature I read for my content analysis.

Disability and Impairment: What's the Difference?

Like other broad terms, the terms *disability* and *impairment* hold different meanings for different people. In the United States, the American Medical Association (AMA) defines *disability* and *impairment* based on definitions previously created by The World Health Organization (WHO) in partnership with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). The AMA defines *disability* as "activity limitations and/or participation restrictions in an individual with a health condition, disorder, or disease" and *impairment* as "a significant deviation, loss, or loss of use of any body structure or bodily function in an individual with a health condition, disorder, or disease" (Lowe, 2010, p. 222). It is important to recognize the differences in these terms as they are how people choose to identify themselves. Based on these definitions, *disability* can be considered as more of an ‘umbrella term’ whereas *impairment* is more specific to one—or multiple—disabilities. Some examples of common disabilities include cerebral palsy or Down Syndrome, while examples of impairments include a vision impairment or hearing impairment (also known as ‘hard of hearing’).

Another point to mention is that a disability or impairment can occur at any point in time throughout a person’s life, from before birth, during childhood, adulthood, or later in life. Likewise, both of these terms can be thought of as existing on a spectrum similar to one’s gender identity or sexual orientation. Though two people might have the same disability and/or impairment, their ranges of ability to complete daily life activities and fully participate in society and reaching typical lifetime milestones—like graduating high school, getting married, or getting a full-time job—may be impacted. To complete these activities, they may need to use assistive technologies/devices (ATDs) or receive full-time or part-time care from a trained professional who is knowledgeable about their disability/impairment and their specific need(s), which provides access to more resources and opportunities that may not otherwise be available due to outside factors like location or socioeconomic status.

Disability versus (Dis)ability

Salient to the discussion of disability versus impairment is the use of *disability* versus *(dis)ability*, or *ability*. *Disability* indicates the limitations for what one is not able to do, even with proper accommodations and/or assistive technologies, whereas *ability* frames what one can do with proper accommodations and/or ATDs. Again, for the purposes of this paper, I will be using the term *disability*, though I personally prefer to use *ability* when referring to my own impairment. One should be mindful when using either the term *disability* or *ability*, especially if they themselves are not disabled or impaired, as that can conjure the well-sounding intentional phrases like "different abilities" or "differently abled," which some disabled people might find offensive or inferior.

Person-First Language (PFL) versus Identity-First Language (IFL)

It would not be fair to discuss the terms *disability* and *impairment* without acknowledging the debate surrounding person-first language (PFL) versus identity-first language (IFL). As explained above, these terms are unique to each individual who experiences a disability and/or impairment throughout their lifetime, and people not only have the fundamental *right* to choose how they identify with a disability or impairment, but how others refer to them as a disabled person. The idea of person-first language versus identity-first language first appeared in the 1990s as disability advocates recognized that they were not always spoken about in kind, thoughtful words, and rightfully deserved better and could educate others about how they wanted to be identified. (For example, people might have used the word *handicapped* to describe someone who uses a wheelchair.) Now, with both of these languages, people have options, and are quite opinionated about them.

While it is arguable that both languages are used to "speak appropriately and respectfully about an individual with a disability," there is a difference between the two (CDC, n.d.). PFL puts the person *before* the disability (as in, "the woman with autism") while IFL puts the person *after* the disability (as in, "the autistic woman"). In fact, the PFL versus IFL debate has drawn much attention from members of the autism community as Brown (2011, para. 3) describes in a personal blog post:

> In the autism community, many self-advocates and their allies prefer terminology such as "Autistic," "Autistic person," or "Autistic individual" because we understand autism as an inherent part of an individual's identity -- the same way one refers to "Muslims," "African-Americans," "Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer," "Chinese," "gifted," "athletic," or "Jewish." On the other hand, many parents of Autistic people and professionals who work with Autistic people prefer terminology such as "person with autism," "people with autism," or "individual with ASD" because they do not consider autism to be part of an individual's identity and do not want their children to be identified or referred to as "Autistic." They want "person-first language," that puts "person" before any identifier such as "autism," in order to emphasize the humanity of their children.

Regardless of one's (dis)ability, it is clear that word choice matters, as words are used to positively or negatively connotate meanings of how we shape our understanding of self and others. PFL separates the disability from the person's whole identity—their disability is just one part of them--whereas IFL acknowledges the disability as a formative part of their identity—their disability is not separate from their identity. Though neither way is inherently "wrong" to use, it *is* wrong to *not* use someone's preferred language--PFL or IFL—or use slurs like *handicapped*, *crippled*, or *mute,* all of which further contribute to the stigma and misunderstanding surrounding having a disability or impairment. Personally, I prefer to use PFL, but for the purposes of this paper I will refer to the characters using IFL, as for this specific instance, I believe the disability or impairment cannot be separated from other aspects of the character's identity; it is part of who they are.

Critical Disability Studies, Intersectionality, and Critical Literacy

The terms above relate to the critical discussion of disability, how disability intersects with identity, and how to critically examine the texts one reads. Critical Disability Studies (CDS) is a subset of Critical Race Theory (CRT), which originated out of the American Civil Rights Movement and Critical Legal Studies (CLS) in the 1970s

(Walker, 2015, pp. 135-136). Famous CRT scholars include Kimberlé Crenshaw and Derrick Bell. CRT recognizes the intersections between one's race/ethnicity, power, and the law, and CDS was created to expand on this definition to include one's disability. Specifically, CDS acknowledges disability

> as both a lived reality in which the experiences of people with disabilities are central to interpreting their place in the world, and as a social and political definition based on societal power relations. […] Critical disability studies seek to change conventional notions of disabled people as pitiable, tragic victims who should adjust to the world around them (Reaume, 2014, p. 1248).

This indicates the power one has when taking ownership of their disability (for example, choosing to use PFL or IFL), along with how their disability is affected by pre-existing societal and political norms/conventions, and even barriers to accessing resources.

Intersectionality is related to disability critical studies in that it is a "prism for understanding certain kinds of problems" that people from traditionally marginalized groups encounter (Crenshaw, 2018, 0:34-0:36). The term intersectionality was first coined by Black legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in a 1989 paper about the oppression Black women face. This term considers the various identities of a person such as their race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, ability, and how those identities overlap or intersect to create unique levels of societal discrimination. Meanwhile, *critical literacy,* which is based off of critical theory and critical pedagogy, "views text meaning making as a process of construction with a particularly critical eye toward elements of the particular historical, social, and political contexts that permeate and foreground any text" (Patel Stevens and Bean, 2007, p. 5). Through this lens, the reader looks carefully at the text through a social justice and equitable lens. As a librarian, teaching students to critically examine the information they find is an important aspect of the profession. This includes representations of minority populations in literature such as persons of color or people with disabilities.

Ableism and Ableist Language

> "Ableism is a lifetime of isolation, a lifetime of segregation, a lifetime of untold stories of "Once upon a time there was a cripple who could" and for every cripple that could there was and is an able-bodied person who should but doesn't…"
>
> —Palacios, 2017, as cited in Nario-Redmond, 2020, p. 37

The exploration of the above terms relates to the existing societal and political beliefs regarding disability, specifically Ableism. According to Dunn (2015, p. 10) the terms abled and disabled create an automatic "us versus them" binary that can be harmful to children as they are expected to fit into one or two boxes: disabled or nondisabled. Concerning youth, *ableism* can be defined as

> The devaluation of disability that results in societal attitudes that uncritically assert that is better for a child to walk than roll, speak than sign, read print than read Braille, spell independently than use a spell-check, and hang out with nondisabled kids as opposed to other disabled kids (Hehir, 2007, as cited in Nario-Redmond, 2020, p. 5).

Like PFL and IFL, Ableism came out of the disability rights movement in the United States and Britain (Nario-Redmond, 2020, p. 5). And similar to the definitions of *disability* and *impairment*, the definition for *Ableism* is quite broad. The simplest definition boils down to "prejudice and discrimination toward individuals simply because they are classified as disabled—regardless of whether their impairments are physical or mental, visible or invisible" (Nario-Redmond, 2020, p. 6). To explain this, Nario-Redmond (2020, p. 6) presents the ABCs of ableism: Because of the societal constructs that exist around having a disability, non-disabled people are automatically conditioned to feel gross or pitiful if they run into a disabled person (affect) and offer to provide some type of assistance or avoid interactions with that person (behavior), especially if the nondisabled person believes the disabled person needs some type of assistance (cognitive beliefs/stereotypes).

In the wonderful poem “Naming Ableism,” Palacios (as cited in Nario-Redmond, 2020, pp. 1-2) provides real-world examples of what ableism means from a disabled person’s perspective. I selected several lines I find particularly striking, though I recommend the reader read the entire poem:

> Ableism is when you say that I don’t act disabled and expect me to take that as a compliment…/
>
> Ableism is when disabled parents are told they should not be parents…/
>
> Ableism is the way media portrays us as either objects of pity or inspiration…/
>
> Ableism is you feeling like I should be grateful for the ramps and the parking spaces as if access was not a basic right…/
>
> Ableism is when you think I don’t have a disability because you can’t see it…/

Palacios’ poem above highlights just some of the many levels of discrimination and prejudice disabled people face from nondisabled people. As previously noted, word choice matters, and we often may not think about the underlying messages we send to others when we use Ableist words. From the brief search I did on Google.com for “examples of ableist language,” several results pages appeared with article titles like *6 Common Phrases You Didn’t Realize Where Ableist* (Bustle.com), *Challenging Ableist Language* (GLSEN), and even *Trends and Tips: Writing Disability,* for authors whom, I assume, are not-disabled and writing about a disabled character (The Cincinnati Review). Molly (2013) and Brown (2018) created lists of ableist language, which include but are not limited to words/phrases like:

- Crazy

- Insane
- Dumb
- Retarded
- Blind to/turn a blind eye too
- Deaf to/turn a deaf ear to
- Bound to a wheelchair (wheelchair bound)

I wanted to include this section on ableist language as I will be looking for these words in the literature I examine for my critical content analysis. Specifically, I will be counting how many times they appear per book. I want to do this to highlight their frequencies so that librarians, authors, and readers alike are aware of these words' continued appearance in everyday media and provide a space for conversation and reflection to occur for the appropriate use of words that do not inherently oppress or offend disabled people.

To conclude, this section's purpose was to explain the critical terms and theories central to my critical content analysis and my professional practice as a future school librarian. The following section will discuss my chosen methodology in further detail in light of these terms.

Methodology

Content analysis is one popular method for those interested in conducting qualitative research. White and Marsh (2005), as cited in Short (2017, p. 5), describe *content analysis* as “an umbrella term used to indicate different research methods for analyzing texts and describing and interpreting the written artifacts of a society”. For researchers who decide to analyze existing data--in my case, already published young adult literature--this research “involves the close reading of small amounts of texts that are interpreted by the analyst and then contextualized into new narratives” (Short, 2017, p. 3). Like the terms *blindness* and *vision impairment* discussed in the beginning of my literature review, *content analysis* and *critical content analysis* might sound like they are the same, but they are not.

The broadest definition of *critical content analysis* is that it “involves bringing a critical lens to an analysis of a text or group of texts in an effort to explore the possible underlying messages within those texts, particularly as related to issues of power” (Short, 2017, p. 6). Compared to content analysis, “Critical content analysis differs [...] in prioritizing a critical lens as the frame of the study, not just as part of interpreting the findings or citing scholarship in a literature review” (Short, 2017, p. 5). Researchers who conduct critical content analyses “focus on locating power in social practices by understanding, uncovering, and transforming conditions of inequity embedded in society” (Rogers, 2004, as cited in Short, 2017, p. 2). For example, this might include studying inequities present in existing data (literature) like race, gender, or disability. Overall, when the researcher decides to take this critical stance, they are focused on “voice and who gets to speak, whose story is told, and in what ways,” which to me is reminiscent of the idea of the counter-story briefly discussed in my literature review (Short, 2017, p. 5).

Since the purpose of this paper is to better understand the representations of blindness/vision impairment in recently published young adult literature, I chose to conduct a critical content analysis for several reasons. The first reason is that I consider myself a disability advocate and strive to dismantle disability stereotypes and ableist language in my daily life. In order to identify these stereotypes, ableist language, and other intersectionalities these characters have in common; I chose to complete two rounds of intense coding by hand, and then input the data into Microsoft Excel for further analysis. The second reason is that I needed to spend a sufficient amount of time with each book to understand how the disabled characters were portrayed as whole persons and the similarities and differences they might have in common besides their disability (being blind/visually impaired). The third and most personal reason is that, as stated in my positionality statement, I was born with a vision impairment and know what it is like to live with a disability such as blindness/low vision, and was honestly curious what representations of blindness/vision impairment looked like in contemporary young adult literature today, as I never encountered a book that acted as a “mirror” for me as a child and an adolescent. Since I will be a future school librarian, I believe it is my responsibility to curate a robust collection of fiction and nonfiction materials where all students see themselves and their experiences honestly reflected. Because of my proximity to the research topic--blindness/vision impairment--I had to keep an objective lens as I might have subconsciously tried to compare and contrast the characters' experiences to my own lived experience as a person with a disability.

My role as a researcher was in-depth and solitary as I spent a large chunk of time individually reading, coding, and analyzing the five books I selected. Discussed in the previous section were several key concepts and theories that have influenced my choice of research method. Personally, I felt that a critical content analysis was the best research method to use compared to other methods like a case study, interviews, or observations because of time constraints and my desire to deeply understand individual characters' experiences and how those experiences did or did not relate to the experiences of a 21st century adolescent living with blindness/vision impairment.

Collecting the Data

I used a non-probability sampling technique called purposive sampling to select five contemporary young adult novels to critically analyze. Simply put, purposive sampling "refers to a process where participants are selected because they meet criteria that have been predetermined by the researcher as relevant to addressing the research question" (Saumure & Given, 2008, p. 562). To fit my sampling criteria, these books had to be published in or after 2010; be available in the English language; be available in regular print or large print format; feature a main character who is blind/visually impaired; and be accessible to me via online ordering websites such as Amazon. To select appropriate books to use, I extensively reviewed several book recommendation websites like GoodReads, Book Riot, Novelist, and various blogs to find books that fit my criteria. In spring 2020, I applied for a $150.00 Carnegie Grant (see Appendix A: Carnegie Grant Application) through The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

School of Information and Library Science to purchase these books and coding materials like office supplies (notebook paper, highlighters, post-it notes). After combing through these websites and seeing what was available to purchase within my budget, I selected the following five novels: *The Ables* (Jeremy Scott, 2015), *Blind* (Rachel DeWoskin, 2014), *Girl, Stolen* (April Henry, 2010), *Love and First Sight* (Josh Sundquist, 2017), and *Not If I See You First* (Eric Lindstrom, 2015).

Since I also wanted to find out whether or not the books I chose to analyze were accessible to K-12 students in the central North Carolina region, I reviewed three public school districts and three public library OPAC catalogs to see what format(s) each book was available in, such as print, digital, (such as e-book or audiobook), large print, or another format such as Braille; and the number of copies each library had. To maintain privacy, I assigned pseudonyms to each school district and their corresponding public library system:

- School District A
- School District B
- School District C
- Public Library A
- Public Library B
- Public Library C

Analyzing the Data

For my critical content analysis, I carefully analyzed each young adult novel for the following thirteen characteristics:

1. Whether or not the author of the book has a disability

   a. If so, what disability do they have? If not, do they mention any research they conducted prior to writing about blindness/vision impairment?

2. The blind/visually impaired character's intersectionalities
   a. Race, family background, age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, language, culture, religion, and disability
3. The description and length of the character's blindness/vision impairment
   a. What is the name of their condition? How long have they been blind/visually impaired?
4. The character's emotion toward their disability and other disabilities
5. Assistive technologies/devices the character uses to perform activities of daily living (ADL)
6. The presence or lack of contemporary teen experiences as established by Carroll and Penny Rosenblum (2000)
   a. Sexual pressure
   b. Family/friend conflict
   c. Dating
   d. Violence
   e. Drug and alcohol use
   f. Self-confidence/Self-esteem
7. Where the character attends school
   a. If they attend a public school, do they receive any push-in or pull-out instruction from a vision teacher itinerant or orientation and mobility instructor? If so, what kind?

    b. If they attend a residential school for the blind, what types of curriculum do they receive?

8. The presence of Person-first Language versus Identity-first language
9. The presence of ableist language as defined by L.X.Z. Brown (2018)
10. Disability stereotypes the character fits into or defies as established by Rubin and Strauss Watson (1987)
11. How the character's family, friends, and teachers treat them in response to their disability as mentioned by Heim (1994)
12. Heim's (1994) five criteria for disability representation
13. Carroll and Penny Rosenblum's (2000) seven questions about disability representation

Study Impact and Limitations

I believe this study has major potential for impacting a variety of stakeholders including secondary school librarians, public school librarians, K-12 teachers, authors, students, their parents/caregivers, and the publishing industry. All of these parties can become more aware of disability representation in young adult literature, why it is necessary for libraries to collect this type of literature in the 21st century, and the numerous benefits this literature can provide for adolescent readers like positive identity development and bibliotherapy. For librarians in particular, they can be encouraged to purchase more books that positively showcase *all* types of diverse life experiences like disability in their schools and communities, so that *all* readers feel like they see themselves in the library collection. Librarians can work to actively promote this literature in book displays, book talks, and at events with children/teens. If a school library does not have a strong collection of disability literature, the public library can supplement that gap in their collection, and vice versa. This relates to librarianship's best practices in making sure that all types of libraries have equitable, diverse collections that accurately mirror the individual characteristics of their user population.

Likewise, K-12 teachers can be encouraged to use these books during instruction and in forming relationships with students, as statistics show that more students will come into K-12 education from diverse backgrounds including disability over the next 30 years. Authors can also learn how to avoid using disability stereotypes and ableist language in their writings about disabled characters, and the importance of having information in texts about disability that is as medically and factually accurate as possible, as this may be the only exposure some readers have to a disabled person. Furthermore, students and their parents/caregivers can reap benefits from having this literature available and accessible to them as it can teach them about cultural competency, the importance of respecting another person's similarities and differences, engender empathy and understanding of various kinds of disability, and encourage the dismantling of stereotypes and ableist language use in everyday life. Especially for disabled students, they can be happy and excited that books featuring characters like them exist in their school or public library collection and grow in self-confidence and acceptance of their disability. Finally, the publishing industry itself—a predominantly white, female, and nondisabled field—can strive to recruit, retain, and publish more authors from marginalized communities like disabled authors and authors of color, as counter-stories are much needed in our society today.

I also believe this research has potential impact on the theoretical framework that underpins the study. This study shows how critical frameworks like Disability Critical Studies and Intersectionality can be applied to a specific genre of literature and a specific disability to show authors, librarians, teachers, and students how disabled characters (and to a larger extent, disabled people) deserve well-rounded, authentic representation and treatment in all aspects of life. The use of these frameworks acknowledges the specific struggles that blind/visually impaired people face on a daily basis compared to other types of disabilities like a hearing or learning disability, as they try to navigate a world that was not created for them.

Subsequent research about this topic may include research of blindness/visual impairment representation in children's picture books, middle grade literature, and/or adult literature. Researchers could study representations of other disabilities—such as hearing, orthopedic, or learning disabilities—in children's, middle grade, young adult, or adult literature, and the characteristics these characters share beyond their disability status. Likewise, researchers could focus on the availability and accessibility of books featuring characters with varied disabilities in school and public library collections and involve gathering school and/or public librarians' and authors' opinions about varied disability representation in literature.

On the other hand, limitations for this method include my being subjective toward my research sample, the physical access I had to the books and OPAC catalogs themselves, and the fact that I did not conduct interviews with any school or public librarians to present their opinions about having disability literature in their collections. As mentioned, I selected only five young adult books that feature blind/visually impaired characters because of time constraints; however, there are more than just these five books that exist in other genres like children's and adult literature. Other limitations for analyzing existing data are that the text may present one "viewpoint" or narrative about the disability, and that the book's author was influenced by their own biases/assumptions about what it is like to have a vision impairment, especially if they themselves do not have a vision impairment. Inherently, content analysis is limited as a methodology in that it only contains description and analysis (the *what, who, where, when)* of the text; it does not provide evidence of *why* or *how* a text was written the way it was.

Results and Discussion

The Ables

> "Even though my eyes don't work—they never have—I've been a witness to some pretty fantastic things. Some horrible, some wonderful."
>
> —Jeremy Scott, *The Ables*

The Ables was the first book I read for my thesis; it is also the only book that contains fantastical elements although its setting is realistic. Told entirely from twelve-year-old Phillip Sallinger's point-of-view, *The Ables* is a 2019 novel about a group of six young boys—Phillip, Henry, James, Bentley, Freddie, and Donnie—who experience various setbacks in learning how to use their superpowers independently and together in order to save the world from an evil superhero named Finch. Basically, Finch believes Phillip is the reincarnation of a dangerous god named Elben because he meets various prophesized criteria such as being a "blind, shamed, outcast […] who does not see the world as others do" (Scott, 2019, p. 287). Except there is a catch: all the boys have various physical and mental disabilities that conflict with them being able to fully utilize their powers. For example, Phillip is completely blind but has telekinesis powers, while his friend James, also blind, has telepathic abilities. Meanwhile, Henry uses a wheelchair because he was "born crippled" and can read minds; Donnie has Down Syndrome and can run very fast; Freddie is known as "Freak-Out Freddie" because he has chronic asthma *and* gigantism; and Bentley has ataxic cerebral palsy, which negatively affects his balance, and superior abilities in solving math and science problems.

Phillip first learns about his superpowers after his family moves from New York City to Freepoint at the beginning of the novel. Freepoint is described as a "safe haven town for superheroes and those who support them," and is home to Freepoint High School, a public school that serves students in grades seventh through twelfth (Scott, 2019, p. 12). It is not mentioned whether Phillip receives any push-in or push-out instruction, or if he attended a residential school for the blind to learn how to use any assistive technologies/devices he has.

Throughout the novel, the boys—who call themselves *The Ables* after learning about a group of disabled superheroes from centuries ago who fought crime under that nickname—use their own disabilities to help each other "overcome" their disabilities. The most prominent example is the relationship between Henry and Phillip. Since Henry can read minds, he realizes one night at a sleepover that he can transfer what he sees into Phillip's mind in real-time. This allows Phillip to actually *see* snapshots of images despite his blindness and lets him move items with his telekinetic abilities that are in Henry's field of vision. Phillip describes the process:

> He wasn't transmitting a live video feed to me but he was sending something more like a simple still photograph. But I could still sort of hold Henry's image in my head for a while and search it for the one thing I really needed it for (Scott, 2019, p. 131).

However, learning how to use their superpowers together involves a lot of trial and error which sometimes gets the boys into big trouble, as Phillip and Henry learn that there is a lag of time between when the image gets transferred to Phillip's brain and when the object itself in the image that Phillip wants to move, actually moves. For example, at one point when the boys are trying to petition the school board into letting disabled students participate in the Super Simulation—a schoolwide event where students are able to test out their abilities in small groups to defeat 'criminals,' played by school staff and community members—Phillip unexpectedly tosses the gavel into a woman's face instead of her hands. Sitting outside in the hallway with Henry after being banned from the rest of the hearing, Phillip explains, "We carried on silently, in somber reflection, as we both contemplated life as shamed superheroes, as heroes too broken to be considered useful" (Scott, 2019, p. 134).

Largely, Phillip's intersectionalities fit those of the typical white privileged male. Phillip is described as a white, skinny twelve-year-old male with brown hair. His family is the nuclear type—he has an adoring mother and father and a younger brother, Patrick, whom he sometimes gets along with. He describes Patrick as "eleven going on four," his dad as humorous, and his mother as overprotective, perhaps because he is her first son or because of his blindness (Scott, 2019, p. 7). While his gender is mentioned, his sexual orientation is not, which makes sense because there is not a hint of romance throughout the story. Phillip's family is middle-class, American, English speaking, and perhaps Christian as they celebrate Christmas and Easter together. As mentioned above, Phillip's disability is blindness—he was born blind while his friend James lost his eyesight in an accident when he was a child. Once he learns that his friend Henry is Black, he explains his colorblind thoughts about race: "Race had never even been a consideration for me—it's easy to be colorblind when you're also regular blind. […] The color of his skin was just another one of those details to which I'd never given much thought" (Scott, 2019, p. 142). Of course, even if Phillip cannot actually *see* another person's skin tone, including his own, it is wrong for him to think that the difference between being black or white *and* having a disability does not matter, as one cannot be separated from the other.

Researchers from the National Disability Institute (Goodman, Morris, Boston, and Walton, 2017, p. 19) have found that Blacks are not only more likely to have a disability, but that their disability has a greater impact on their lives than it does for white disabled people.

In my opinion, Phillip does not have strong emotions toward his disability. In fact, "I spent a lot of my earlier years denying that blindness even made me different at all" (Scott, 2019, p. 35). Even his friend Henry, upon meeting Phillip for the first time, says that Phillip seems "pretty normal" for a blind kid (Scott, 2019, p. 35). However, immediately after finding out that he had been placed in a Special Education class at his new high school, Freepoint High, "I was confused and angry. I had never felt so insulted in my short life. I was blind, not disabled. *There's a difference!*" (Scott, 2019, p. 36). There is indeed a difference as blindness *is* a disability, but Phillip questions whether or not that difference necessitates him needing "specialized learning," as "[…] even in New York—in public school, no less—I'd been in regular classes. […] Nearly a thousand gifted kids in this school, and I somehow got stuck in the remedial group" (Scott, 2019, p. 35). To me, this demonstrates Phillip's bias toward using person-first language rather than identity-first language as he tries to clearly separate his disability from every aspect of his life including schoolwork.

However, as each classmate takes turns introducing themselves, their disability, and their superpower to him, Phillip's comments on their revelations turn emotional: "Most of the stories were actually kind of heartbreaking—like Delilah's. Delilah Darlington sat directly in front of me. She had superhearing, but she was also deaf. I thought it was the saddest thing I've ever heard" (Scott, 2019, p. 39). This is an example of Reuben and Strauss Watson's (1989) first stereotype—person with a disability portrayed as pitiable and pathetic—as Phillip is doing just that to Delilah. Instead of him simply acknowledging the limitations that her disability sets on her superpower, he decides to pity her in the following sentence because her superpower directly works *against* her disability. Without Henry's help, though, couldn't Phillip's blindness also directly contradict his ability to see and transport items since he cannot physically judge the size or girth of an item with his eyes? A few paragraphs later, when Donnie is introduced by his paraprofessional as having Down Syndrome, Phillip is wary: "I'd never met anyone with Down Syndrome before, but I was pretty sure a fifteen-year-old in the body of a twenty-something-year-old was something worth being afraid of" (Scott, 2019, p. 40). This is another example of Reuben and Strauss Watson's (1989) tenth stereotype—person with a disability being isolated from disabled and nondisabled peers—as Phillip excludes Donnie from his social realm before they even have the chance to meet each other. Other characters, like Penelope, who is allergic to sunlight and can change the weather, are simply used as filler characters—appearing only for a moment before not being mentioned again until later in the book, if at all, which fits Reuben and Strauss Watson's (1989) fourth stereotype of person with a disability used as "atmosphere".

There are several more examples of Phillip and his friends fitting into Reuben and Strauss Watson's (1989) disability stereotypes. Besides the stereotypes mentioned above—person with a disability as pitiable and pathetic, used as atmosphere, and as isolated from disabled and nondisabled peers—Phillip is portrayed as the object of violence and as sinister and/or evil (stereotypes 2 and 3). At the beginning of the novel, after all of the students are gathered for an exciting assembly about the upcoming Super Simulation (SuperSim) competition, Phillip and his friends return back to their classroom, only to have their hopes crushed when Mrs. Crouch explains that disabled students are not able to participate in the competition because the school is worried about their safety and well-being, as well as the safety and wellbeing of nondisabled students. Their reasoning is simple, if not unfair: Twenty years ago, the last time the competition was held, a disabled student unintentionally caused a fatal accident in which several students and staff died. Obviously seeing the discrimination in this policy, Phillip and Bentley devise a plan to get an official hearing before the school's Board of Education to petition for their right to participate in the SuperSim. After Bentley challenges the board's decision with a strong argument about the Americans with Disabilities Act, Phillip is "[…] insulted by the president's rather casual implication that our mere participation made the SuperSim more dangerous for the other kids, like it was already a given fact that disabled people equaled danger" (Scott, 2019, p. 125).

Likewise, Phillip is portrayed as his own worst enemy (stereotype 6) when it comes to using his superpower and for making friends in a new school: "My blindness wasn't causing me public shame; it was just holding me back" (Scott, 2019, p. 44). Thus, his blindness portrays him as a burden to others (stereotype 7) as it negatively affects him from being able to participate in the SuperSim competition and fit in with his nondisabled peers. Furthermore, Phillip fits the criteria for stereotype 10, person with a disability as incapable of fully participating in everyday life. Although he was supposedly "fine" with his disability, having made peace with it several years ago,

> it was starting to feel like growing older only lengthened the list of things the rest

> of the kids my age could do that I could not. […] I could try to compensate in other ways all I wanted, but I would never be able to see, which meant there was a host of things I'd never be able to do. In some ways, I would always be an outsider (Scott, 2019, p. 44).

Lastly, Phillip and the rest of *The Ables* gang, excluding Donnie, are portrayed as "supercrips" at the end of the novel for helping end the Freepoint Massacre (Finch's destructive plan), while Donnie's memory receives harsh treatment from the majority of townsfolk: "I guess it was just hard for some people to admit that their salvation had come from a kid like Donnie, especially the ones who'd been the most outspoken against him earlier" (Scott, 2019, p. 392). In fact, the town only designated a memorial to Donnie because of Bentley's pestering to sue the city council. While visiting the memorial, Phillip thinks, "We were the disabled kids they found acceptable to call heroes, while Donnie was the one they preferred to remember differently. […] It felt wrong, but we were definitely glad to no longer be complete outcasts. Now everyone loved us" (Scott, 2019, p. 393). In the end, it seems Phillip got exactly what he wanted—to fit in, to not feel like a complete outsider, to learn how to use his powers despite his disability—although it came at a steep price.

Throughout the novel, Phillip uses various assistive technologies/devices (ATDs) to perform activities of daily living, such as navigating the school hallways, and to fight crime with his new friends. Besides reading comic books in braille, Phillip uses a braille watch, a collapsible cane, and a Personal Navigator, which is a unique handheld device that provides Phillip cardinal directions to help him navigate the town of Freepoint. Also, he says that his family—even his little brother Patrick--does a great job of "[…] setting the scene for me when we went someplace new," which is important because it shows his family's interest in describing what is around him so that he is safe and aware of what exactly is going on around him (Scott, 2019, p. 9). His family does not just let him flail on his own, using his cane to identify every obstruction in his path; they use descriptive words so that he can create his own ‘mental map’ of his surroundings.

Phillip also has several contemporary teen experiences such as family/friend conflict, violence, and self-confidence/self-esteem. For example, he and Henry get into various disagreements while participating in the three Super Simulation rounds, as Phillip wants the group to stay in one place where a crime *might* happen instead of roaming around the city stopping crime *as* it happens. Later on, Phillip’s mother and Donnie both get critically injured in separate battles trying to protect Phillip and his friends from being killed by Finch, and eventually succumb to their injuries and die. Phillip blames himself for these losses as they were caused by violent outbursts from Finch in retaliation to Phillip’s denial of himself fulfilling the Elben prophecy, though he tries to glean positivity from it as he vows to be a leader for the new students in his Special Education class.

The violence Phillip experiences is mostly thanks to Finch and his henchmen, although he also experiences some bullying in the beginning of the book by two older boys named Chad and Steve. The first day at Freepoint High during lunch, Chad and Steve approach Phillip to ask if he could demonstrate his telekinesis powers by moving his cell phone off the table. Phillip eagerly agrees--“I wanted to fit in and be liked and show off my special abilities”—without realizing that Steve and Chad actually picked up his phone and threw it against the wall, where it smashed and broke into pieces (Scott, 2019, p. 46). A few chapters later, Chad and Steve confront Phillip and his friends in the cafeteria again, clearly looking for a fight. Angered that disabled kids may be able to participate in the competition, Chad exclaims, “I’m pretty sure the last time they let disabled freaks like you compete in the SuperSim, you ended up killing one of us normal kids” (Scott, 2019, p. 101). Phillip tries sticking up for the group, saying how he would like to meet Chad outside of school to show him how his powers *really* work, when Chad punches him in the stomach, causing Phillip to hit his head and black out. Meanwhile, the violence Finch inflicts on Phillip is more lethal—it involves fireballs, guns, menacing words, and at one point, a three-ton bomb that Finch threatens to detonate if Phillip does not agree to join him in his quest to fulfill the Elben prophecy.

Lastly, Phillip’s self-confidence/self-esteem is about the conflict between his superpower and his disability. The day he learns about his superpowers, Phillip’s dad tells him that he has to first “overcome” his blindness in order to use it. However, Phillip quickly becomes dismayed when he fails to lift his cell phone off the picnic table. He laments, “My parents were wrong about me. I didn’t have superpowers. I was just another normal, boring, blind kid” (Scott, 2019, p. 18). At school the following day, when he is running late to his first class and accidently walks into the wall, he has another negative thought: “What would [the students] whisper to each other about the idiot blind kid who couldn’t even get to his first day of high school on time, who arrived sweaty and bruised?” (Scott, 2019, p. 34). Likewise, “I always felt like I had an extra layer of doubt beyond what most kids did, just from not having any visual confirmation of, well, anything,” although Henry is able to eventually help Phillip “overcome” this physical limitation (Scott, 2019, p. 21). For Phillip, though, celebrating Halloween with his friends offers a sense of comfort and separation from his blindness: “Costumes felt like disguises to me, and I guess that helped me feel less different, less disabled. Less me" (Scott, 2019, p. 180).

Overall, it seems that Phillip's family, friends, and teachers treat him with respect—they treat him like they would any other kid with or without a disability. In school, there is no mention of Phillip receiving any kind of special treatment or differentiated assignments because his teacher thinks he cannot complete it. Everyone is mostly courteous of his disability, knowledgeable of his limitations, and work hard to make sure that he is able to navigate the world around him and understand what is going on. Phillip makes genuine friendships with the boys in The Ables group and, like true friends, they have some disagreements but resolve them quickly. Out of Heim's (1994) five criteria—accuracy of information, lack of stereotypes, literary quality, if the book confronts the disability portrayed, and books not "using" disabled characters—I think this book meets three of them: accuracy of information, literary quality, and if the book confronts the disability portrayed. For example, Phillip uses assistive technology/devices like a collapsible cane, reads braille, and has a braille watch; the book is well-paced, engaging, and easy to read; and Phillip confronts his blindness in learning how to use his superpowers. Contrarily, this book contains several disability stereotypes, and some disabled characters are more "used" than others—for example, Delilah and Penelope, who only make appearances in the beginning of the text to frame the setup of Phillip's Special Education class with; they neither take away or add any interesting factors to the plot. Donnie is also "used" in a sense as the disability martyr since he risks his life to save others, an act that Phillip wonders if he would ever be able to do if put in the same situation.

Likewise, I think this book meets several of Carroll and Penny Rosenblum's (2000) criteria. For example, the book has characters who have congenital sight loss *and* adventitious sight loss (Phillip and James), although there are no characters with low vision; the book has characters who attend public school and have contemporary teen experiences; the family and peers of the character with visual impairment act realistically toward that character; and the family and teachers expect the character with visual impairment to be a successful independent person. However, there are no concrete examples of issues that teenagers with visual impairments face in the 21st century, such as being non-drivers—Phillip only alludes to these issues: "I could try to compensate in other ways all I wanted, but I would never be able to see, which meant there was a host of things I'd never be able to do" (Scott, 2019, p. 44). Also, the story's resolution does not involve a cure for Phillip's visual impairment, Phillip is still blind and relying on Henry's mind-reading ability in order to see. I did have to do some research to find out whether or not the author, Jeremy Scott, had a disability. According to an interview with *Publishers Weekly*, he discussed his experiences with hearing loss, anxiety, and depression (Publishers Weekly, 2019, para. 3). While valuable experiences in their own right, this does not relate to the specific experiences of being a blind/visually impaired person and unfortunately limits the opportunities for blind/visually impaired writers to share their own experiences, as their spot is already taken by someone else's voice.

Blind

> "So I might not be "sighted" anymore, but maybe I'm not that much blinder than anyone else, just a different kind of blind."
>
> —Rachel DeWoskin, *Blind*

Blind is a 2014 novel by Rachel DeWoskin about a fifteen-year-old girl, Emma Sasha Silver, who is having trouble adjusting to her new life as a “total”—totally blind person—after losing her eyesight in a Fourth of July fireworks accident the year before. The story begins with Emma’s return to her public high school, Lake Main, after a busy summer spent at the Briarly School for the Blind, “even though it was humiliating and I still couldn’t see” (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 4). At Briarly, while her best friend, Logan, and her other Lake Main friends were hanging out at the lake and falling in love,

> I was pressing the six long, flat keys of an old Perkins Brailler, listening, practicing, sliding and tapping my white cane, finding shorelines where the grass meets the curb, where the wall meets the floor. [...] I was working, focusing, trying not to panic, panting with the hope of being what the Briarly School for the Blind referred to as "mainstreamed" (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 4).

Emma’s transition back to Lake Main is of course, not easy. The day before the new schoolyear starts, a girl that Emma used to be friends with, Claire, is found dead in the lake from overdosing on recreational drugs. Throughout the novel, Emma tries to comprehend this loss by getting a group of Lake Main students together to talk about it, while ruminating over the highs and lows that came with her avoiding, and then accepting, the reality of her new blindness. Often, she compares her own situation to Claire’s, wondering if Claire was depressed enough to commit suicide, or if the overdose was an accident, as the police are unable to give a definitive answer.

Emma is described as white, female, and heterosexual. Her family is middle-class, English-speaking Americans who practice Judaism. She also has a nuclear family—her mother is an artist, her father is a doctor at a hospital, and she has two older sisters and three younger siblings, two girls and a boy. Emma states how she had not thought about money before until one of her older sisters, Sarah, remarks that Emma's new brailler cost the amount of six laptops. In Emma’s mind, “My parents had enough money; we weren’t rich, but they didn’t seem to worry much about food or even raising a huge brood of kids” (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 57). Likewise, the town they live in, Sauberg, is “[…] close enough to the city that […] we can have wholesome childhoods and a four-bedroom house” (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 69). About her disability, she states,

> I’d never heard of *sighted* until I wasn’t anymore, never considered *blind* until it locked on me like a parasite. I hadn’t noticed what an odd or colorless word it is, how it can suck the meaning out of whatever it attaches to (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 2).

To me, this shows Emma’s preference to using person-first language rather than identity-first language as she is uncomfortable with the word *blind* and the mental hold it has on her.

Expectedly, Emma is quite upset with her disability when she first realizes she will never be able to see again. In the months following her accident, she facilitates between anxiety and depression. While still in the hospital, her parents make her start attending therapy with Dr. Sassoman to work through her feelings, a woman Emma describes as “smelling like vanilla lotion” who “[…] guided me around the hospital and objected—like my parents—whenever I said I was going to die “without my eyes” (DeWoskin, 2014, pp. 38-39). In September, when everyone else started school,

> I became part of the dark, scratchy couch fabric. I was clutching the braille cube I never learned to use, not moving, cold-sweating. […] It felt like I literally wasn’t there; everyone else was still human, living on the same earth I’d once been on. They were doing human things like starting ninth grade at Lake Main, but I had dropped out of the world. I lived in this weird, dark, spinning void (DeWoskin, 2014, pp. 46-47).

Emma chooses to wear sunglasses all the time so that “no one would ever get to see my disfigured eyes again” as the diagonal scar on her left eye is embarrassing to her (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 110). One eye is open while the other is shut. By the end of the novel, though, while reflecting on Claire's death, she is able to push her sunglasses up and away from her face, finally acknowledging and accepting her new identity.

In my opinion, Emma feels confused about her relationships with other disabled characters. For example, when thinking about the advice a blind girl named Dee gave her at the Briarly School for the Blind last year, Emma states how "Dee was someone I wouldn't have been friends with at Lake Main, and I can't even explain why this is" (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 28). Since her accident, "I can't stop dividing my world into things I do 'because of it,' and things 'I would have done anyway,'" as if there is some ethical code she must follow now that she is blind (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 28). Another student she met at Briarly, a boy named Sebastian (also known as Seb) who she was romantically interested in for a while, was the first one to tell her to stop with her "PBK bullshit"—Poor Blind Kid act—as everyone at the school had their own story (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 134). The more you wallowed in your own story, the longer it would take to get out of it and move on. Emma says that Sebastian tried to be her braille tutor, invite her to places with him, and be her hero. "But maybe he just wanted to be my friend. I don't know. I don't know how to think of it. […] I never asked him anything, because asking might have made our friendship real" (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 141). For Emma, making their friendship real also meant making the last year real, making her accident and her blindness real and permanent. Later in the novel, though, Emma gets the chance to meet a nine-year-old girl named Annabelle through her dad's hospital. Unlike Emma, Annabelle has retinitis pigmentosa, a congenital disease that can cause blindness and deafness. Emma is able to find positivity in this relationship as she is able to teach Annabelle some skills for how to cope with her new blindness, such as sewing braille label markers in her clothes. Similarly, one day at a meeting for Claire's memory with her Lake Main friends, Emma decides to invite Sebastian and Dee to the meeting, having not talked to either of them in months. At the meeting, she realizes then that "No one seemed to think I was made doubly or triply blind by having blind friends"; instead, her Lake Main classmates accepted Emma's guests as people, too, and listened to their contributions to the discussion about Claire (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 337).

In *Blind,* Emma uses a variety of assistive technologies/devices (ATDs) to get around Lake Main, her home, and Sauberg. Her favorite 'device' is Spark, who is not a real guide dog though she treats him like one, as she is not legally allowed to get a real guide dog until she turns sixteen-years-old. Spark is special in that he "has never once made being blind worse for me" (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 49). To complete schoolwork, she uses audiobooks, reads braille, has a HumanWare brailler, and a slate and stylus (basically, a handheld braille device that you write words backwards in). At school, she has a paraprofessional, Ms. Mabel, a woman who reads the board to Emma, helps translate her assignments into braille, and maneuver around school. Emma explains how before she was blind, she would have loved extra time to write her final exams or complete assignments, "But now […] I feel furious and proud and want to show everyone that I don't need anything "special," even though I clearly do" (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 22). Also, Emma uses a collapsible cane, a braille watch, and makes braille tags for her clothing out of pieces of milk carton to identify what is in her closet. Once she was released from the hospital, her parents hired a mobility coach, Mr. Otis, "who came and pried me off the couch so I could learn how to walk, find my own room, pour and drink a glass of water without spilling it everywhere, and get to and from the bathroom"

(DeWoskin, 2014, p. 50). The skills and techniques Mr. Otis taught her were reinforced through her time at the Briarly School for the Blind. Now at Lake Main, Emma takes accelerated English and other regular curriculum classes (topics like history, math, and science), while at Briarly, she took Braille for Beginners, regular curriculum classes, and a technology course. Briarly had a life skills center where students were able to learn how to perform activities of daily living like cooking, typing, and doing laundry. Emma describes that "Briarly's idea wasn't to build a separate world for blind kids but to teach us how to be blind in the regular world" (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 127).

Back at her home in Sauberg, Emma has several contemporary teen experiences like sexual pressure, dating, and self-confidence/self-esteem. The sexual pressure she feels is more self-imposed, as she often wonders if/when she will lose her virginity and if anyone will ever date her now that she is blind: "Who would fall in love with me? Was I unlovable? Would I always be unlovable?" (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 57). After her best friend Logan reveals to Emma that she lost her virginity to a guy named Zach Haze—Emma's lifelong crush--the summer while she was at Briarly, Emma feels jealous and betrayed since everyone seemingly knew about it except for her. "She hadn't told me because I would have been a babyish, jealous PBK about it. I was inexperienced and pathetic; how could Logan confide her tortured, sexy secrets to someone like that?" (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 237). Emma also finds out that Logan hid more lies from her, including partying with girls like Blythe and Claire and guys from school, and doing drugs, which relates to Emma's lack of self-confidence/self-esteem:

> Had they all felt sorry for me out loud, Emma Sasha Spinster Silver, trapped forever in the worst year of my life, my "horrific tragedy," no longer a part of their glorious society, where girls could giggle and swim and see. Where they could have sex. And tell each other about it (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 284).

Emma also lacks confidence when it comes to her appearance. One night, Emma asks her mom to describe the “disgusting” scar on her eye, which she says feels “[…] thick and ropy and red and purple and horrible” under her fingers. Instead, her mom tells her that “nothing about you could ever be disgusting,” to which Emma retorts, “But I knew she was wrong; I was ruined inside and out,” presumably because of her blindness and the scar caused from it (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 114). Likewise, she does not believe that she is prettier than Logan; she refers to herself as “disfigured,” saying that if anyone ever saw her without her sunglasses on, “[…] they’d run like it was a zombie movie” (DeWoskin, 2014, pp. 213-214). Upon returning to Lake Main for the new schoolyear, “Logan didn’t seem to get that now I was one of the actual weirdos, someone who would probably never be normal or okay” because of her disability (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 11). She is worried that if she starts rocking herself at school—an activity many blind/visually impaired people do to calm themselves down—people will think she is a “freak,” so she tries to avoid doing this to blend in as much as she can (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 13). Simply put, Emma spends a lot of her time worrying about what people think of her now that she is blind, not realizing that mostly everyone plans to treat her the same.

Besides these experiences, Emma spends some time using drugs/alcohol, and has family/friend conflict. Of course, the main topic of drug/alcohol use relates to Claire’s suspicious death, though Emma also drinks some wine with her mom, at a sleepover with some girlfriends, and with classmates at meetings about Claire’s death. As mentioned above, her family/friend conflict is her losing trust in Logan and then figuring out how to rebuild that trust; and her realizing that the accident causing her blindness hurt more than just her, it hurt her siblings as well, as the family’s entire dynamics shifted to accommodate Emma’s new world. Emma wonders,

> How much had my older sisters suffered? How scared or traumatized were they? I know this sounds crazy, but it wasn't until I heard Sarah's teeth make the sound that I really thought of it. My accident had seemed like mine alone, or mine and my mom and dad's or something. [...] So isn't it possible that my accident might have been life-wrecking for Sarah in more ways than just costing her our parents' attention? (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 351)

Furthermore, there are several stereotypes from Reuben and Strauss Watson (1989) that Emma fits into *and* defies. The most prominent examples are in the beginning chapters of the book as the reader is introduced to Emma’s story and her life before/after she became blind. At first, Emma is portrayed as pitiable and pathetic (stereotype 1) and as incapable of fully participating in everyday life (stereotype 10):

> I want to stop thinking about forever in the dark and my endless, claustrophobic tunnel of a future. Because I’ll never drive or get a job, or get married or lose my virginity. Maybe I’ll never even kiss anyone. […] The way people stare and fuss makes me feel like I’m trapped under a magnifying glass, gasping and sweating, in danger of catching fire. Again (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 33).

She also wonders if she will ever be known “anywhere for anything other than being a tragic disaster girl,” yet is secretly grateful for Claire’s accident in that it takes away attention from her own (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 252). She is perhaps her own worst enemy (stereotype 7) because she lacks confidence in her identity and her new abilities to navigate the world as a blind person. Conversely, she is not portrayed as asexual (stereotype 9) as she has several thoughts about sex, romance, and even kisses a boy, Josh, near the end of the book, then daydreams about what it would be like to ask another boy, Coltrane, on a date, and kiss him too. She is not isolated from disabled and nondisabled peers—in fact, she has opportunity to spend time with both groups at Lake Main and at Briarly School for the Blind. Eventually, she is able to overcome the stereotype of being incapable of fully participating in everyday life (stereotype 10) as she realizes, “Maybe I was wrong thinking that after my accident I have no choices anymore. Maybe every minute is a choice I make to be alive for that minute. And the next and the next” (DeWoskin, 2014, pp. 340-341). I do not believe there were examples of her being portrayed as an object of violence (stereotype 2), sinister and/or evil (stereotype 3), used as “atmosphere” (stereotype 4), as a “super crip” (stereotype 5), or as laughable (stereotype 6).

I believe most of Emma’s family, friends, and teachers treat her with respect. Her family works diligently to make sure that she has the resources, trainings, and knowledge to navigate the world, and her disabled and nondisabled friends fully engage with her; they do not seem afraid or intimidated by her disability, though Logan does use the disability at one point as an excuse to hide certain experiences from Emma, such as not inviting her to sneak out of someone’s house while at a sleepover since she had already gone home. Similarly, Emma is able to grow and accept her blindness through resurrecting her friendships with Sebastian and Dee, having realized that she can use them as a support system—that when they all met at Briarly, they were trying to help her adjust to her blindness as much as she was originally willing to *avoid* adjusting to it. However, Emma’s art teacher, Mrs. Fincter, is wary of her ability to fully participate in class, assigning Emma to an independent study project since she “[…] has pretty much made it clear that I’m a tragic special-needs invalid” (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 189).

Likewise, I think *Blind* fits several of Heim’s criteria, specifically the accuracy of information, the literature quality, if the book confronts the disability portrayed, and books not “using” disabled characters. For example, many of the techniques and ATDs

Emma uses are those that blind/visually impaired people also use on a daily basis, such as a collapsible cane or braille. The plot is easy to read, intriguing, and covers many topics that are familiar to teens today. In fact, the author, Rachel DeWoskin, uniquely describes Emma's experiences through smell, sound, and colors. Emma is also able to confront her disability and shake its dark hold off of her life, and none of the disabled characters are "used" in order to make a nondisabled character look better. However, there are several stereotypes Emma fits into as defined by Reuben and Strauss Watson (1989).

Finally, *Blind* also meets several of Carroll and Penny Rosenblum's (2000) criteria, such as the book having characters with congenital and adventitious sight loss (for example, Annabelle and Emma); and characters with low vision and blind characters (Sebastian and Emma). The book has a minor character with low vision, and characters who attend public school and have contemporary teen experiences. *Blind* also has characters who are facing issues specific to teenagers with visual impairments in the 21st century, such as being non-drivers in a society where driving symbolizes independence and entrance to adulthood. For example, take this quote, when Emma considers this exact predicament:

> So maybe Seb is right and this is the kind of self-pity that nothing will come of, but never being able to go anywhere myself or have the same freedom as Logan and everyone else gives me a dropping feeling, like the *forever* of being dead. It's just such a long time not to be able to drive. Not to grow up for real. I can't tell anyone. I mean, Seb still skis and plays beep ball. [...] And unlike him, I'll never take the driving test. But Logan will. And Naomi and Jenna and Benj and even Babiest Baby Lily (DeWoskin, 2014, p. 108).

Furthermore, the story resolution does not involve a cure for the visual impairment—Emma is still blind and using her ATDs to get around town. The families and peers of the character with visual impairment act realistically toward them, and the families and teachers (all except Mrs. Fincter) expect the character with visual impairment to be a successful independent person.

Like *The Ables,* I found that the author of *Blind,* Rachel DeWoskin, is not disabled herself, though she explains in the author's note that she did a lot of research before writing the book to understand what life is like for a blind/visually impaired teenager in today's world. She utilized resources from renowned organizations such as the Chicago Lighthouse for the Blind, received braille lessons, visited people's homes to see how their "talking computer" and slate and stylus worked, and their guide dogs. She also met with teenagers to learn about Beep Ball and how to use a white cane, had discussions with blind/visually impaired people in how they 'see' and understand the world, and what it means to be pretty as a blind/visually impaired adolescent. In writing about a community that she is not a part of, DeWoskin acknowledges that she does as much research and asks as many questions as possible to get to the truth of, "Who is this character? What is this character's experience like?" Again though, while the time she put into doing research is valid and probably improved the overall quality of her telling Emma's story, the books DeWoskin says she writes—the books that she wants to see in the world, full of brave, strong, and conflicted heroines—can and should be told by authors and readers alike who have lived these experiences and belong to those unique communities such as the disability community.

Girl, Stolen

> "Being blind is just who I am now. I try not to think about it all the time. […] Being blind gave me a whole new life. I didn't ask for it."
>
> —April Henry, *Girl, Stolen*

The 2011 novel *Girl, Stolen,* by April Henry is unique in that it is the only book I read told from the third person point-of-view, and involves two main teenage characters, Cheyenne Wilder and Griffin Sawyer. The chapters flip between Cheyenne and Griffin's experiences throughout the same day as Cheyenne, an affluent sixteen-year-old girl who is legally blind and battling a bad case of pneumonia, tries to escape her kidnappers after her stepmother's car is hijacked by seventeen-year-old Griffin in a pharmacy parking lot. At first, Griffin does not even realize Cheyenne is in the car; when he does realize it is her, it is already too late for them both, since his dad, Roy, discovers Cheyenne's father is the president of the Nike company and puts out a hefty ransom for Cheyenne's return. Throughout the novel, there are several tense moments as Cheyenne has to rely entirely on Griffin and her remaining senses to help her escape without either of them getting caught by Roy or his two henchmen, TJ and Jimbo.

Interestingly, *Girl, Stolen* was inspired by real life events. As mentioned in the author's note, the author April Henry was originally inspired to write this story after hearing about the abduction of Heather W. in 2005. Heather's abduction and Cheyenne's are eerily similar: both girls are blind—Heather since birth and Cheyenne since an accident three years ago—and both were sitting in the back of the car with the keys in the ignition to keep the heater on when the cars were hijacked. In Heather's case, once her kidnapper realized she was blind *and* in the backseat, he let her go, dropping her off on the side of the road in the middle of nowhere. Except for Cheyenne, she is not so lucky, as Griffin feels like he has no choice to take her back to his house, where she is held captive for nearly twenty-four hours against her will.

I felt it was only appropriate to examine both Griffin and Cheyenne's intersectionalities as Henry makes important distinctions between the characters' lives, family backgrounds, and influences that lead them to where they are at the beginning and end of the novel. For example, both characters are white—Cheyenne is described as having "black hair with huge brown eyes"—and she has a father and a stepmother, Nicole, who is a nurse (Henry, 2011, p. 4). Likewise, both characters have suffered a great loss recently—Cheyenne's mother was killed in the same car accident that robbed Cheyenne of her vision three years previously, and Griffin's mother left him to move to her hometown of Chicago to get away from his abusive drug-dealing father. (At least, that is what he is told.) Cheyenne identifies as female, Griffin as male, and both come from English-speaking, American families. Neither one's religion nor sexual orientation is mentioned, though it is hinted at that Griffin finds Cheyenne attractive. However, they come from wildly different socioeconomic backgrounds, as Cheyenne's father makes enough money so that the family is able to dress in designer clothes and send Cheyenne to the best private school in Portland; while Griffin's father runs an illegal car-stealing business, where they strip cars' VPN numbers off and sell the parts for cheap. As mentioned, Cheyenne's disability is low vision. Henry alludes to Griffin perhaps having a disability as well, such as dyslexia, because he dropped out of high school after realizing that reading print was too hard for him.

In my opinion, Henry does a good job of summarizing Cheyenne's disability in a way that is clear and concise to readers:

> The doctors had called what had happened to her a contracoup injury. […] What it meant was that all of Cheyenne's central vision--the 20/20 part, what most people thought of as seeing--was gone. Most of her peripheral vision was gone, too. [She was] legally blind. [...] What she was left with was a blurred sliver of

> color and shapes. Now, if she wanted to see anything at all, she had to turn her head away from it (Henry, 2011, pp. 37-38).

Early on in the novel, the reader is presented with Cheyenne's condition so that they are able to understand the difficulty of escaping kidnappers she cannot only see the faces of but see the location of where she is. Hence, Cheyenne has to depend heavily on her other senses like her senses of touching, hearing, and smelling to safely navigate her way out of Griffin's house, into the deep woods behind it, and toward the main road without getting caught and killed by Roy. As Henry (2011, p. 23) describes, not only does Cheyenne know how to use her other senses in ways that sighted people did not, she had also "[…] learned the hard way to always, always pay attention to what was around her, to pick up as many clues as she could".

Griffin first notices Cheyenne is blind when she blatantly tells him so from the backseat as he escapes the pharmacy parking lot: "I won't be able to tell [the cops] anything. Didn't you notice that I'm blind?" (Henry, 2011, p. 8). Driving back home in the stolen vehicle, he studies Cheyenne's appearance in the rearview mirror, noting how "Her eyes were open and unfocused, which was kind of freaky. […] It was weird that he could look at her and she wouldn't know" (Henry, 2011, p. 20). I was happy to read these sentences, while a bit taken aback at the words *freaky* and *weird* in reference to a disabled person, as this is the only novel in which a nondisabled character describes their feelings and thoughts when interacting with a disabled character.

Cheyenne's emotions toward her disability are conflicting. Like Emma from *Blind, when* Cheyenne first loses her vision at age thirteen*, she* facilitates between anger, hopelessness, and depression. "What was the point? The world was a scary place" now that she could not see how she used to (Henry, 2011, p. 92). One day, when her nurse, Danielle (now her stepmother) comes into the room, basically to tell her that she should suck up her feelings and move on as she cannot wallow in pity forever, Cheyenne has an angry outburst:

> […] My life is over. I'm never going to drive a car, I'm never going to go on a date, and I'll be lucky if I get a job in some shelter for the handicapped. [...] I'm sick of people saying 'you're still young,' 'you'll adapt,' 'God never closes a door but he opens a window'. Well, that's all BS! I won't adapt. I'm blind. My mom's dead and I'm blind!" (Henry, 2011, p. 95).

Slowly, Cheyenne is able to focus on Danielle's advice of putting all her energy into things she can control—such as her reaction to her new disability and learning how to live with it--rather than things she cannot control such as her sudden vision loss and her mother's death. Her emotions stir up again when she attends a residential school for the blind where she learned orientation and mobility skills. She also had to "things she had known how to do for so long that she didn't remember not knowing them. How to feed herself. How to dress herself. How to walk without bumping into things" (Henry, 2011, p. 96). At the school, Cheyenne observes how

> Many people there were […] in shock, wondering what had happened to them. She remembered in particular one guy who kept saying, "But how will I be able to do things if I can't drive?" After a while, she wanted to slug him. He was forty at least, so he had had a life. He had had his chance. Cheyenne hadn't even really gotten started (Henry, 2011, p. 96).

This demonstrates Cheyenne's emotion towards other characters with disabilities as she quickly becomes jealous and angry of the life experiences the older man had at the clinic before he lost his vision, rather than recognizing him as an equal in that they had both permanently lost one of their physical senses. Compared to him, she feels that he has no right to complain about such trivial actions, such as driving, because she will never get that opportunity in the first place. Likewise, as the years progress and Cheyenne adjusts to her new reality, she still maintains a false hope that one day she will be able to see again. In fact, she still feels like she can “see”—for example, she is able to ‘see’ every detail in her childhood bedroom, and the mental maps of her hometown city from traveling up and down the streets while sighted. Although her sadness about becoming blind lingers:

> Sure, Cheyenne had learned how to “travel” with a cane—which was what the professional blind people called it. She learned how to use a computer that spoke to her. She had learned how to organize her clothes so they weren't inside out or clashing. She could cook, eat, put on makeup, do her nails, fix her hair. But it still couldn't take away the times when she said something about a person she thought wasn't in the room--only they were. Or the cashiers who saw Cheyenne put the clothes on the counter and open her wallet and still said to her friends Kenzie or Sadie, "Will she be paying by check or credit card?" As if she wasn't capable of speech (Henry, 2011, p. 50).

Again, like Emma from *Blind,* I think this shows Cheyenne’s preference of person-first language rather than identity-first language because she still wants to participate fully in everyday life activities that nondisabled people do with ease, such as shopping and putting on makeup, and be looked at by others as “normal” as possible. More so, to be seen beyond her physical disability, although she acknowledges that being blind “is just who I am now” (Henry, 2011, p. 108).

In contrast to Emma from *Blind,* Cheyenne is more like Phillip from *The Ables* because she only experiences two out of several contemporary teen experiences, violence and self-confidence/self-esteem. For example, when Cheyenne arrives at Griffin’s house, he places her in his bedroom and ties her hands and ankles together so that she cannot escape while he figures out a plan to help her. She is able to smash a coffee cup against the dresser and use a shard of it to protect herself, which comes in handy when one of Roy’s henchmen, TJ, tries sexually assaulting her while Griffin is in the kitchen. She tells Griffin that if he had not come in and stopped TJ, that TJ would have tried raping and killing her. Similarly, she reveals to Griffin that the car crash she was in with her mother was quite violent—her head was smashed against a stop sign and the only part left of her mother was her shoes. When Cheyenne is finally able to flee the house around two a.m., she decides to inflict violence on others as she hits Griffin over the head with a big screwdriver. In the process of getting through the dense forest and onto the main road, she acquires several scratches and bruises from the rough terrain, and even has to defend herself by being violent against Roy—shooting him in the hand with his own gun after he tricks her into believing that he is a police officer come to rescue her.

Likewise, her issues with self-confidence/self-esteem are evident in her initial reactions to becoming blind when she is thirteen. For example, the quote about Cheyenne hating her white cane: “Canes were for old people. Handicapped people. Not teenagers. Not for people like her” (Henry, 2011, p. 90). At sixteen, she still has trouble fitting in with her peers as she is able to ‘pass’ for a sighted person: “Everyone told Cheyenne that she didn't look blind, that she looked "normal". If she hid her cane, then people talked to her, not to whoever was with her. Everything changed if they figured out she was blind" (Henry, 2011, p. 60). While she is held captive, she wonders if she can use her blindness to her advantage to escape as her blindness is also her biggest weakness.

Comparatively, I believe there are examples of Cheyenne fitting into and defying several of Reuben and Strauss Watson’s (1989) disability stereotypes. The first stereotype she defies is person with a disability portrayed as pitiable and pathetic (stereotype 1). From the beginning of her kidnapping, Cheyenne recognizes that she has to make Griffin think she is a “poor blindy” in order to escape (Henry, 2011, p. 25). She also is portrayed as isolated from disabled and nondisabled peers while being held at Griffin’s house (stereotype 11), which she is able to defy once she escapes from her kidnappers and is reunited with her nondisabled family members. However, at the beginning of the novel, Henry (2011, p. 50) presents Cheyenne being portrayed by *other* nondisabled characters as incapable of fully participating in everyday life (stereotype 10), such as the memory of Cheyenne waiting to pay for her items at the cash register and the cashier asking her friends if she will be paying by cash or check, as if Cheyenne is unable to respond for herself. This comment is a blatant example of nondisabled people being ignorant of the limitations and abilities of disabled people, blind/visually impaired people included, as it presents an ableist message that disabled people as inferior to complete activities of daily living on their own without assistance. Also, I would argue that the fourth stereotype, person with a disability used as atmosphere, is present as minor characters—such as the older man at Cheyenne's rehabilitation school—are only mentioned to illustrate Cheyenne's adjustment to being legally blind and the myriad feelings she has like jealousy and anger; in fact, there are no other mentions of blind/visually impaired characters in the novel.

Cheyenne mentions using several assistive technologies/devices (ATDs) in her daily life, though her lack of some—such as her guide dog, Phoenix, and her collapsible white cane—make it more difficult for her to escape her kidnappers. She reads braille, has a braille watch, and folds the money in her wallet a certain way, which I find is an important realistic detail about a blind/visually impaired person as this was not mentioned in the other novels I read. Henry also mentions how Cheyenne is able to identify what exact change she has by running her fingers over the edges of the coins, which is a trick I do too. As mentioned previously, Cheyenne attends a private school in Portland, Catlin Gable, where she takes regular curriculum classes and extra classes. Talking about their different education experiences, she tells Griffin, “I have a computer class in a special room they set up for me. The computers at school and at home have a program that can read to me" (Henry, 2011, p. 119). While her teachers sometimes forget to read what they wrote on the board, attending school is not as bad for Cheyenne now that she has Phantom, which she explains is like a “visual cue” that she is blind, in case her teachers or peers forget (Henry, 2011, p. 119).

Cheyenne’s family and friends, including Griffin—though I would say he is more of an acquaintance—seem to treat her with respect and care. Griffin quickly adapts to assisting Cheyenne through navigating his messy house, helping her drink a glass of water, and chasing after her in the woods to make sure she arrives at the main road safely without any trouble. He even prepares food for her and gives her medicine to ease the coughing spells from her pneumonia. However, Cheyenne’s interactions with two of her teachers when she first becomes blind are less respectful. While one teacher states that he will not be lenient with her “just because you have a handicap,” another says how she is quite impressed with Cheyenne’s work and that “you can hardly tell you have a handicap” (Henry, 2011, p. 124). As if Cheyenne’s disability automatically requires her to receive some sort of special treatment from her teachers and that the quality of her work would decrease now that she has limited mobility due to her blindness; that her loss of vision negatively impacts her abilities to do academic-related activities such as thinking critically or writing research papers.

Overall, I believe *Girl, Stolen* fits two of Heim’s (1994) criteria in that there is accurate information present about Cheyenne’s blindness, such as the assistive technologies/devices she uses and the description about her vision loss; and the literature quality is good. The writing is fast-paced and has some minor plot twists that keep the reader engaged throughout the story; the unusual situation—a blind girl getting kidnapped by a sighted teenager—is intriguing in itself, and the plot lends well to switching from Cheyenne to Griffin's point-of-views as the reader is able to see how both characters experience the same situations from different perspectives. However, there are several stereotypes about disability present in the novel, the book does not confront the disability portrayed, and disabled characters are "used"—for example, through his interactions with Cheyenne, Griffin is able to turn his life around and become a better person by helping her escape; if she was not blind, I am not sure Griffin would have treated her the same way that he did.

Conversely, *Girl, Stolen* achieves several checkmarks from Carroll and Penny Rosenblum's (2000) criteria. The novel only mentions the main character, Cheyenne, having adventitious sight loss—though there are other characters mentioned at the rehab facility who are blind, there is no description of these characters' sight loss. The book does have a character with low vision, but she attends an expensive private school, and she faces only a few contemporary teen experiences like violence and self-confidence/self-esteem. Furthermore, the character with a vision impairment faces issues specific to teenagers with visual impairments in the 21st century, such as being a non-driver, and the story resolution does not involve a cure for the vision impairment. Broadly, the families and peers of the character with visual impairment act realistically toward them and expect the character to be a successfully independent person, though the teachers of the character with visual impairment questions the character's ability to be successfully independent in academia.

Once again, the author of *Girl, Stolen,* April Henry, is not disabled. In a question-and-answer section at the end of the novel, Henry states that—like the authors of *The Ables* and *Blind*—she completed research in order to better understand the experiences of a blind/visually impaired teenager living in today's world and the assistive technologies/devices a disabled person may use (or have to improvise the use of) in order to escape a dangerous situation. While her story is honorable in that it was inspired by a real-life kidnapping that happened to a blind teenage girl, Heather W., *Girl, Stolen* takes away the autonomy that a person such as Heather W. has in telling her own version of what happened that day in 2005. In this regard, there seems to be no place for the 'counter-story' to fit as nondisabled people, such as Henry, have already claimed a disabled person's right to make their own voices and experiences heard, whether they be based in reality or imagination.

Love and First Sight

> "Attending the school for the blind, day after day, year after year, it felt like I was trapped in the starting area of real life. Sure, I was safe there. But I was also bored."
>
> —Josh Sundquist, *Love and First Sight*

Love and First Sight, a 2017 novel by Josh Sundquist, follows sixteen-year-old blind teenager Will Porter's first semester at a public high school in Toano, Kansas. The novel begins with Will's first day of school, where he meets with Assistant Principal Johnston, has an embarrassing encounter with a girl in the stairwell, and makes another student cry for staring at her too long. (Unbeknownst to him, he did not realize he was staring in her direction.) Will is fortunate to meet a group of students his first day at lunch that invite him to join their friend group. Throughout the novel, the reader gets to experience alongside Will the ups and downs of life at public school, potentially falling in love with a girl named Cecily, and the results of a life-altering operation that finally give him the ability to see for the first time.

As this is the only other book I read that has a main male character, Will's intersectionalities mirror those of Phillip's from *The Ables.* Will is described as White, an only child, and has a traditional nuclear family, a mother whom he describes as a "professional helicopter parent and a country clubber" and an "uptight surgeon" father (Sundquist, 2017, pp. 30-38). He identifies as a male heterosexual and his family is English-speaking Americans; there is no mention of religion. His socioeconomic status, like Cheyenne's from *Girl, Stolen,* is upper-class; they can afford to live in a gated neighborhood because of his dad's job as a urologist and afford extravagant purchases such as a Tesla. Also, like Phillip from *The Ables,* Will's disability is congenital blindness, as he was born blind; although his level of blindness does change as he gains partial eyesight from an experimental surgery.

Evidently, Will's emotions toward his own disability change throughout the novel as he tries to fit in with his nondisabled peers at his new school, and as a result of his vision operation. At the beginning of the novel, Will explains why he wanted to transfer from the residential school for the blind, where he had attended since he was five-years-old, to a public high school: "I transferred because I want to prove that I can live independently in the sighted world. No dependence on charity. No *neediness*" from others (Sundquist, 2017, p. 5). In order to get his dream job as the "Stevie Wonder of journalism," he admits that "it's not going to happen within the confines of the blind bubble—excuse me, *the visually impaired community.* I have to go mainstream"

(Sundquist, 2017, p. 5). In a later paragraph, he explains his choice about leaving the residential school for the blind in the same way as to answer the question about why he does not wear sunglasses indoors, simply because “The vast majority of the world doesn't […], and I want to fit in. I'm not trying to fake anything, but there's no reason to call attention to what makes me different” (Sundquist, 2017, p. 13).

After he finds out about the experimental surgery from his father, Will admits that he has always wondered what it would be like to have eyesight:

> The truth is, I’ve always wanted eyesight. I mean, obviously. I’d love to be able to see. It's not like I'm unhappy with myself the way I am or bitter about being blind or something. I get along all right. I'm fine with who I am. But if there's a chance I could gain eyesight, I mean, come on (Sundquist, 2017, p. 78).

However, there is a long way for Will to go before he is able to see, if at all. First, he has to have a B-scan performed to identify if he is a viable candidate for the operation. Then, he has to undergo two surgeries—the first surgery is to transplant healthy corneas into his eye, and the second operation will determine whether or not Will gains vision. The recovery process is expected to be long and arduous, with a 50% chance of Will gaining sight and a 50% chance of Will remaining blind. While his mother is excited about the surgeries and their potential for Will’s future, Will’s father is not excited, as he understands there could be various complications. One of these complications that Will’s doctor points out, Dr. Bianchi, is that Will’s blindness could become very uncomfortable. After a discussion with his dad, Will wonders who he will become if and when he is no longer Will Porter, a blind teenager, as being blind and being part of the blind/visually impaired community has been a large part of identity for the past sixteen years. If the operation is successful and he gains vision, Will asks himself:

> What will I be like? And the other kids in school--the hundreds of voices I pass by each day in the hall--what will they think? […] Will they think that I am a sellout,

> giving up the life I was meant to live, the body I was born with, not accepting my place and my condition and my community? Or will they accept me as one of their own, without question? (Sundquist, 2017, p. 141).

Clearly, he is as worried about the loss of his identity—blindness—and the comfort he has in that identity, as he is about what his nondisabled peers and society might think about his decision. He has always wanted vision but did not realize that forgoing his blindness to gain sight would cost him in more ways than just physical costs.

Thankfully, Will's operations are both successful, though the immediate results are disappointing. After waking up from his second surgery, Will is heartbroken to find out that he is still surrounded by blackness—still blind. Like his doctor predicted, this blindness is worse, "more unbearable. Before, my blindness felt like nothing, and now I have this loud static in my brain that offers only distraction and pain" from the decision he made (Sundquist, 2017, p. 154). Likewise, he realizes his dad was right—that the operation could change him not for the better, but for the worse. Remorseful, Will states,

> Now I know I will never be happy as a blind person. Now that I have had a sample--not of full eyesight, per se, but of believing that it could be mine--and then had it ripped away from me, I will be forever stuck in this twilight world of dissatisfaction (Sundquist, 2017, p. 154).

Will is quick to judge, though, because the following day he wakes up and is indeed to see for the first time. He is ecstatic about his new reality, and quickly takes to learning all of the things—such as colors, objects, faces, and even his own reflection in the mirror and his limbs—he was not able to see before. The next few months, Will attends physical therapy to strengthen his eyes, and only runs into minor complications such as fluid build-up in his eyes. By the end of the novel, the reader glimpses into Will's future as he presents the morning announcements, telling all of the students and staff at his high school that he will hopefully be reading off the regular teleprompter soon instead of his braille terminal.

Like most teens, Will has a variety of contemporary teen experiences through *Love and First Sight* such as family/friend conflict, dating, and self-confidence/self-esteem. His major friend conflict is with Cecily; it happens when he finds out that she was hiding a secret from him for the past three months—a purplish birthmark that covers the top half of her face. This is one of the contemporary teen experiences Will has—family/friend conflict. Cecily was bullied all through school because of birthmark, even getting nicknamed "Batgirl" because of her resemblance to Batman, which Will automatically thought was because she was spending time with him as he is blind just like bats are. When they get into an argument about Cecily hiding this fact from him, Will realizes that she "Basically […] used my disability to feel better about herself" (Sundquist, 2017, p. 223). Because Will couldn't see before his operation, Cecily purposely hid her birthmark from him as she felt too self-conscious about it; for her, being friends with him was the first time she had not felt judged by others based on her appearance. Despite his conflict with Cecily later in the book after his operation, he is very interested in dating her… or anyone, really… at the beginning of the novel. Will says he had several girlfriends at the school of the blind but dating at the high school "would be different. Dating a girl with a visual impairment, I couldn't help but be beholden to her. Dependent. *Needy*" which Will *definitely* does not like to be viewed as (Sundquist, 2017, p. 10).

Meanwhile, Will's self-confidence/self-esteem issues are tied up in a multitude of factors like how his nondisabled peers and friends view him (or how he *thinks* they view him), his budding feelings toward Cecily, his questioning before and after the operations, and how his appearance may make others uncomfortable. For example, when he and Cecily go out to eat dinner one evening, he wants to get the waitress's attention to ask for menus:

> It's silly, but part of me hopes this will impress Cecily--that she will notice how sensitive my hearing is, or at least that she'll feel like she's hanging out with a normal person who knows when a waitress is walking by, not a helpless blind kid who needs someone else to flag down a server for him (Sundquist, 2017, p. 65).

Similarly, at the end of the semester when he is learning his new class routes with Mr. Johnston, Will is timid to ask his friends to help him instead as "I feel like they're finally thinking of me as their friend first, and a visually impaired guy second, and I don't want to mess that up" (Sundquist, 2017, p. 238). This shows Will trying to switch from identity-first language to person-first language, which conflicts with his earlier statements of using identity-first language, for example, when he tells Cecily "I'm blind" after she says it must be frustrating not being able to see anything (Sundquist, 2017, p. 53). Lastly, on Will's first day of school when he makes the anonymous girl cry by staring at her (turns out it was Cecily), he reflects on his mom telling him that she has always wanted him to wear sunglasses in public, "[…] why she tries to make me "fit in" so [people] don't stare in the first place" as his physical disability is apparent when he uses his white cane (Sundquist, 2017, p. 17). In my opinion, there were no examples of Will facing sexual pressure, violence, or drugs/alcohol use.

Furthermore, I believe Will's character from *Love and First Sight* fits into and defies four of Reuben and Strauss Watson's (1989) disability stereotypes. In my opinion, the most prevalent stereotype Will fits into is stereotype 1, person with a disability as portrayed as pitiable and pathetic. For example, on the first day when Mr. Johnston is inappropriately guiding him around the school building—grabbing him from behind to guide him instead of letting Will choose how he wants to be guided—Mr. Johnston does a great job of showing how *not* to assist a blind/visually impaired person. In the crowded hallway, Mr. Johnston shouts, “Clear a path, people! Blind student coming through!” (Sundquist, 2017, p. 7). To which Will, clearly mortified, quips to himself, “Wow, thanks, Mr. Johnston. I'm sure this is gaining me so many popularity points at my new school. My election as Prom King is now all but assured” (Sundquist, 2017, p. 7). A few minutes later in his English class, Mr. Johnston introduces Will to his nondisabled peers by stating, “This is Will, a student who has transferred to our school this year. He's blind. […] Life is very difficult for him. Please offer him assistance whenever you can, because--" (Sundquist, 2017, p. 8). Fortunately, Will cuts him off before he rambles on. In this instance, Mr. Johnston is automatically assuming that one, life is harder for Will because of his blindness; two, that Will automatically needs assistance from others without them having to ask because of his disability; and three, that he is unable to speak for himself and introduce himself to his peers the way that *he* wants to—thereby taking Will’s autonomy away from him. Of course, as mentioned earlier, Will considers himself to be pitiable and pathetic, such as when he wants to get the waitress’s attention when having dinner with Cecily, and wondering if Cecily only decided to text him because she pitied “poor blind Will” after hurting his feelings at the art museum (Sundquist, 2017, p. 59).

Additionally, Will also fits stereotype 6, person with a disability portrayed as laughable, and stereotype 7, person with a disability portrayed as a burden. An example of Will being laughable is on his first day of school, when unbeknownst to him, he accidently walks into the girl's bathroom instead of the boy's bathroom. Also, when he goes to find an empty table in the cafeteria and sit down for lunch, he accidently sits on another guy's lap. Likewise, when his mom comes to pick him up after school in the brand-new Tesla, he feels upset that he complained about the expensive car to her as it emits nearly no noise: "I came home to prove that I could live outside the blind bubble without burdening anyone, but here I am, already being an inconvenience" (Sundquist, 2017, p. 24).

The stereotypes discussed above are relevant to the only stereotype I believe Will defies, stereotype 10, person with a disability as incapable of fully participating in everyday life. From the beginning of the novel, he acknowledges several stereotypes associated with blind/visually impaired people such as sighted people trying to help/save them from what they (sighted people) perceive as imminent danger. For example,

> I've heard the horror stories: Blind people standing on street corners waiting for a crosswalk light to change, only to have a well-meaning but annoying stranger come up from behind, grab their arm, and say (overtly loud, of course, because they always assume we are all deaf, too), "LET ME HELP YOU!" and shove them across a street they were not intending to cross (Sundquist, 2017, p. 3).

Besides Mr. Johnston inappropriately guiding Will throughout his new school and embarrassing him in front of his classmates, Will acknowledges that sighted people, like his new friends, always "[imagine] they are translating vision into words for me, but they're really just describing one image by comparing it to another image, neither of which I have a point of reference for" (Sundquist, 2017, p. 23). Lastly, Will says what he likes the least is "people feeling sorry for me" after Cecily tells him at their visit to the art museum that it must be frustrating not being able to see anything. Offended, he bluntly tells her, "That's sightist, Cecily. Assuming that blind people can't have a full life because they don't have eyesight. My sensory experience isn't less than yours. It's just different" (Sundquist, 2017, p. 53). Finally, I do not believe there were examples of Will being portrayed as the object of violence (stereotype 2), as sinister and/or evil (stereotype 3), used as "atmosphere" (stereotype 4), as "super crip" (stereotype 5), as their own worst enemy (stereotype 7), as asexual (stereotype 9), nor as isolated from disabled and nondisabled peers (stereotype 11).

As expected, the courses Will takes at the public high school differs than what he learned at the residential school for the blind. For example, at the residential school for the blind, one of his teachers, Mrs. Chin, was his orientation and mobility instructor. She taught him how to use a white cane, how to cross an intersection safely, and how to orient himself to the layout of a new building using cardinal directions (Sundquist, 2017, p. 30). All of this knowledge Will implements as he adjusts to the layout of his new high school. For example, as Mr. Johnston guides him around the building on his first day, taking him from class to class, Will uses the Siri app on his iPhone to audibly input the amount of steps and turns it takes to get from one class to another. Interestingly, like Phillip from *The Ables,* Will does not receive any push-in or push-out instruction; in fact, he does not even want to have a full-time paraprofessional as Emma does from *Blind.* (Although I am not sure how that would work in real life as mentioned in the literature review, all disabled students receive either an IEP Plan or a 504 Plan in the public-school setting). One exciting aspect of Will's new coursework is his journalism class, taught by Mrs. Everbrook. Unlike Mr. Johnston, Mrs. Everbrook is quick to explain to Will that she expects honors coursework from him, and will treat him appropriately—for example, not calling out attention to his blindness in front of his other classmates, and working with the school library to make sure he has the appropriate technologies to complete his coursework on time, such as audiobooks and braille books.

Broadly, Will seems to use the same types of assistive technologies/devices (ATDs) as other characters explored in this thesis. For example, Will uses a collapsible cane, a braille watch, reads braille, and uses the Siri function on his iPhone to complete activities such as reading text messages and record voice memos. With his computer at home, he is able to complete readings and homework through having the webpages read to him through a screen-reading application. During school, he wears an earbud in one of his ears at all times so that he can quietly ask Siri questions and listen to messages or readings. Through his journalism class, he is given the opportunity to try out with his friend Cecily for the morning announcements. To do so, he uses a refreshable braille display to read the announcements as he is unable to view the traditional teleprompter.

It seems that Will's family, friends, and teachers—besides Mr. Johnston—treat Will just like any other teen. Will's disability is not dragged on by anyone nor is it ignored as if he does not have one in the first place; they just accept him for who he is. Besides Cecily hiding her birthmark from him, Will's friend group makes sure to invite him to board game nights and eat lunch with him. At one point, they even plan a cross-country road trip so that he can visit California to apologize to Cecily in person. Will admits that after the Incident that caused his parents to send him to the residential school for the blind (after his best friend stole board game pieces from him because the friend knew Will could not see), his mother became very protective of him. Will thinks "[…] she wants my life to be easy because it will make her life easy. She can't let me fail because then everyone would think she failed as a mother" (Sundquist, 2017, p. 17).

Overall, I think *Love and First Sight* fits four out of five of Heim's (1994) criteria in terms of accuracy of information, literature quality, and the book confronting the disability portrayed. For example, Will's use of assistive technologies/devices and how he feels about his disability and the potential chance to see are realistic; the writing is engaging, heartfelt, and humorous; the book confronts the disability portrayed as Will realizes that losing his blindness comes with its own costs. However, there are definitely examples of stereotypes that Will fits into, and Cecily does "use" his disability to make herself feel better for having her own blemish. Likewise, I think *Love and First Sight* fits several of Carroll and Penny Rosenblum's (2000) criteria in that the book has characters who attend public school and have contemporary teen experiences; the families and peers of the character with visual impairment (mostly) act realistically toward that character; and the families and teachers expect the character with visual impairment to be a successful independent person. Also, the story does involve a cure for the visual impairment with the implication that in order to be normal, happy, and independent, one must be sighted. However, the book does not have characters with congenital and adventitious sight loss—the only blind character mentioned is Will; the book does not have characters with low vision; the book does not discuss characters who are facing issues specific to teenagers with visual impairments in the 21st century, such as being non-drivers.

On a positive note, though, the author, Josh Sundquist, identifies as disabled. Upon research I did, it turns out that he is a retired Paralympic, except he does not have low vision/blindness; instead, his left leg is amputated. He is a survivor of a rare form of bone cancer. Like authors Rachel DeWoskin and April Henry, Josh explains in the author's note of *Love and First Sight* that he conducted research in order to write Will's story as authentically as possible. His research involved reading several case studies about real-life procedures similar to Will's operations, and several nonfiction texts and memoirs about blindness/vision impairment. He also watched several movies and documentaries about vision impairment. He urges readers to remember that this book is not a scientifically accurate depiction of blindness/vision impairment, and that he hopes "[…] people with vision impairments will forgive the artistic liberties I've taken as a storyteller" (Sundquist, 2017, p. 279). While this text is a marginal improvement in terms of disability representation as it was written by a disabled author, the specific disability discussed in the text is not shared by its author. Similarly, although Sundquist took the time to acknowledge that visually impaired readers may agree differently with his storytelling techniques, this again eliminates the opportunity for a blind/visually impaired writer to publish their own narrative.

Not If I See You First

> "Seeing is not believing."
>
> —Eric Lindstrom, *Not If I See You First*

In the 2015 novel *Not If I See You First* by Eric Lindstrom, the protagonist, blind sixteen-year-old Parker Grant, has a lot going on her junior year of high school. Since her father suddenly passed away from a drug prescription overdose three months ago, she has been trying to hold her life together by running laps every morning across the empty field near her house. Running is her therapy and her solace from dealing with her pain. In her bedroom every night, she keeps track of how many days she has not cried since her father's death by placing star stickers on the wall. Besides her father's death, she has to deal with her new permanent roommates--her aunt Celia, uncle Sam, cousin Sheila, and eight-year-old Petey, all of whom moved in after her father died so that she would not have to do things like switch schools or learn new walking routes, activities that can be tiring and confusing to someone who is blind/visually impaired. Another curveball is that Parker's public high school recently merged with another public high school, so there is now double the amount of people-traffic in the hallways and, as Parker describes, "noobs" to whom she will have to teach the Rules.

Parker's Rules are unique like her in that they outline ways for how nondisabled people should interact and not interact with her and/or her belongings. The Rules are very concise, humorous, and confront Ableism beliefs. For example, the biggest and most important Rule, Rule #1, is, "Don't deceive me. Ever. Especially using my blindness. Especially in public" (Lindstrom, 2015, p. 26). Other Rules deal with people moving her stuff without her permission, like her cane, as "I need everything to be exactly where I left it"; helping her without her asking for help first; and talking to people that she is with like they are her "handlers" (Lindstrom, 2015, pp. 26-27). Parker does not want anyone to speak about or for her, as she explains that she is capable of both. As she says in Rule #8, "*Blind* doesn't mean brain damaged, so don't speak slowly or use small words" (Lindstrom, 2015, p. 27). Of course, there is a reason for the Rules in the first place: Three years ago, Parker's then-best-friend and boyfriend of two weeks, Scott Kilpatrick, violated her trust when he embarrassed her in front of a group of students during lunchtime. Parker and Scott had snuck into a teacher's empty classroom to kiss, and Scott had invited his friends to watch as they did not believe the couple was really dating, as Parker is blind and Scott can see. However, this was clearly a bad decision on Scott's end, as Parker was mortified to find out people were watching her without her knowledge. Hence, the creation of the Rules, especially Rule #INFINITY, “There are NO second chances. Violate my trust and I’ll never trust you again. Betrayal is unforgivable” (Lindstrom, 2015, p. 27).

Parker’s intersectionalities are similar to those of other characters studied in this paper. For example, Parker is described as white, female, and heterosexual. Her family are English-speaking Americans; there is no mention of religion or socioeconomic status. Interestingly, Parker’s disability—adventitious blindness—is tied into her family background, as *Not If I See You First* is the only title in which the main character does not have a living father or mother. Six years before her dad died, her mom “left and took my eyesight with her” when she drank an entire bottle of wine and crashed the family car (Lindstrom, 2015, p. 93). Parker acknowledges that “I’m never going to have a dad again, or a mom. Those relationships are gone forever. And my friends… it’s just not the same” (Lindstrom, 2015, p. 268). Though she is glad for the great friendships she has with other characters like Sarah, Molly (her peer buddy who helps her navigate around school), and Faith, she recognizes that “[…] they can’t fill the space of a mom or dad who will always love me no matter what,” or provide her the “special warmth I felt one time and somehow know, deep down, I will never feel again” from her brief romance with Scott (Lindstrom, 2015, p. 93).

In my opinion, Parker feels strongly about her disability. She is well aware of the negative connotations surrounding disability and takes every chance she gets to educate her nondisabled peers about her blindness while letting them know she is not inferior or incapable of doing the things an able-bodied person can do because of the limitations set by her disability. For example, Parker has stopped asking if her aunt Celia wants help making dinner because she knows her aunt will always say no. Her aunt always has a different excuse, such as "cutting me a break since I'm "having such a hard time," when "it's really because the best way to help is chopping and she can't stand seeing a blind girl holding a knife" (Lindstrom, 2015, p. 19). Besides the Rules she created, Parker also wears a biker jacket with the sleeves torn off every day to school, which is adorned with humorous and factual buttons about blindness/vision impairment, such as "Yes, I'm blind!" and "Parker Grant doesn't need eyes to see through you!" (Lindstrom, 2015, p. 11). Likewise, she wears a different-colored bandana around her eyes every day to match the rest of her outfit; she even keeps these on while going on her morning runs. Together, these buttons and bandanas give her autonomy and power over her blindness, which I think shows Parker's preference for identity-first language rather than person-first language as she is not afraid or timid about her disability and others' opinions toward her; she fully embraces her blindness as part of her identity and does what she can to move with and beyond it.

As mentioned earlier, Parker attends a public high school, where she is enrolled in several courses like English, trigonometry, and history. At school, she and her best friend, Sarah, hold "the doctor is in" therapy-like sessions where they offer advice to anyone who wants it about a problem in their life. Parker is very blunt in her advice and is not worried about hurting her "patients'" feelings, while Sarah takes a gentler approach in listening and speaking. One aspect Parker does not like about her blindness is that she cannot see how people's faces react to the advice she gives them. Like Phillip from *The Ables,* there is no mention of whether Parker attended a residential school for the blind to learn how to use her white cane, read braille, or take orientation and mobility lessons. She does, however, use a variety of assistive technologies/devices to get around the house, her school, and her neighborhood, such as a talking alarm clock (programmed to the Stephen Hawking voice); audiobooks; a text-to-speech screen-reading function on her computer; and braille tags which she sews onto her clothing and bandanas.

Throughout the novel, Parker has several contemporary teen experiences like family/friend conflict, sexual pressure, dating, and self-esteem/self-confidence. She has two separate conflicts with her cousin Sheila and her friend Sarah. After Sheila picks her up from school, angry and blasting music, Parker asks for the car volume to be turned down, only to end up in a screaming match with Sheila about how Parker's "shitty couple of days"—brought on by Parker's mom's death anniversary and a messy breakdown she had at school over her dad's death—is just as bad as what Sheila is going through (Lindstrom, 2015, p. 181). Sheila states, "Yeah, you got big problems… You really *are* blind! You can't see you're not the center of the universe! That other people have lives and things happen to them all the time and you know nothing about it!" (Lindstrom, 2015, p. 181). In Sheila's case, she felt terrible because she had to switch schools and homes and broke up with her boyfriend, all of which Parker was ignorant of since she had not asked how Sheila was doing with all of these changes; she simply thought Sheila was fine and was not affected by these changes as much as Parker felt *she* was. Similarly, Parker's relationship with Sarah hits a wall when Parker finds out that Sarah is not confiding her deepest secrets to Parker anymore, like making the decision to break up with her long-term boyfriend Rick. Feeling uncomfortable, Parker decides to hold back her own truth about her feelings towards a budding relationship with Jason, a cute guy at her high school, and her relationship with her ex-boyfriend Scott, as "I don't want to be anyone's project or entertainment" (Lindstrom, 2015, p. 172). When she finally talks with Sarah at her house, she realizes that "Sheila was right; I can be totally blind" when it comes to other people's thoughts and feelings—in this case, Sarah's decision to break up with Rick because she realized she was worthy of a love like the kind Parker and Scott had long ago, and Rick was not doing enough to give her that kind of love (Lindstrom, 2015, p. 189).

Speaking of love, Parker's other teen experiences about dating and sexual pressure are mostly tied up in her new relationship with Jason, her old relationship with Scott, and the intersection of the two. While waiting for Jason to meet her for their first date, Parker anxiously wonders,

> Why did Jason ask me out? […] And if I'm cute, wouldn't a lot of other guys have asked me out by now? Maybe they don't because I'm blind, or it's because of my personality and Jason doesn't know any better yet (Lindstrom, 2015, p. 135).

This shows her lack of confidence in her ability to be perceived as an attractive young female worthy of a relationship with the opposite sex because of her disability; for all Parker knows, *blindness* may as well equal *undatable,* as she has no other bearings to go off of beside her two-week-long relationship with Scott in the eighth grade. While the date goes well—Parker and Jason have a lovely dinner and makeout at The Bluff in the backseat of his car—their relationship quickly sours when Jason learns that Scott still likes Parker romantically. In fact, Jason and Parker get into a fight about Scott running past her house to make sure her running route is clear in the morning, which Jason gets offended by as he does not think it is "normal" to be as concerned about an ex-girlfriend as Scott seems to be. When Parker asks him if it is too soon for them to be talking about their being an *exclusive couple*, as they have only known each other for a few weeks and only went on one date, Jason retorts, “You climbed into the backseat fast enough. Is that normal for you?” (Lindstrom, 2015, p. 208). This comment insinuates that Parker goes on many dates with many people that often end up at the makeout spot the Bluff, when in reality it is the exact opposite—Parker has not dated or kissed anyone *since* Scott… but to Jason, it does not matter.

Lastly, Parker’s self-esteem/self-confidence issue is related to her aversion to initially joining the track and field team because she is embarrassed about people seeing her run. As a blind person, she knows that she may run differently or at least look differently (as in, not look like an able-bodied person) while running, and does not want to be judged for it; hence, her likeness to go running early in the morning before anyone is awake enough to see her do so. Although she is able to overcome her self-confidence issue with the assistance of a track teammate, Trish, who can barely keep up with her—it turns out Parker is very fast and good at sprinting short distances. In learning that Trish wants to be her guide on the racetrack to help her avoid debris in the way, Parker says to her friend Sarah, “Why [not]? […] I bet she’d be very glad to say in her college applications that she helped a blind girl achieve her dreams,” defying Rueben and Strauss Watson’s (1989) fifth stereotype of person with a disability portrayed as a “super crip” (Lindstrom, 2015, p. 279).

I believe there are several other stereotypes besides the “super crip” that Parker defies. These are stereotype 1 (person with a disability portrayed as pitiable and pathetic), stereotype 7 (person with a disability as his/her own worst enemy), stereotype 9 (person with a disability as asexual), stereotype 10 (person with a disability as incapable of fully participating in everyday life), and stereotype 11 (person with a disability as being isolated from disabled and nondisabled peers). For example, in one of her first interactions with her new peer buddy Molly, Parker tells her, “Maybe you're thinking I'm a stereotypical blind girl who's out to prove she doesn't need anyone's charity. But instead of being nice to people who are just trying to help her, she's a bitter and resentful bitch” to nondisabled people exactly *like* Molly because she feels like, as a blind person, she is missing out on something—vision—that everyone else takes for granted… when that is exactly *not* the case (Lindstrom, 2015, p. 14). Furthermore, in Parker’s interactions with her aunt Celia about offering to help cook dinner, she acknowledges that aunt Celia is not so worried about Parker’s cooking skills as she is about Parker accidently hurting herself, neither of which thought is productive in aiding Parker to perform activities of daily living on her own. Likewise, Parker’s relationships with teenage boys like Jason and Scott demonstrate she is *not* asexual, in fact she is looking for romantic love with a partner; she is capable of fully participating in everyday life activities like running and shopping for new gym shoes at the mall; and she is never isolated from disabled or nondisabled peers. Personally, I did not see any examples of stereotype 2 (person with a disability portrayed as the object of violence), stereotype 3 (person with a disability portrayed as sinister and/or evil), stereotype 4 (person with a disability used as “atmosphere”), and stereotype 6 (person with a disability portrayed as laughable).

Altogether, Parker’s family, friends, and teachers seem to treat her just like any other teenage girl. Despite the arguments she gets into with her cousin Sheila and her friend Sarah, and her aunt’s lack of confidence in Parker’s ability to cook or shop by herself, no one gives her any extra special attention or makes it known to her that they believe she is inferior because of her disability; they accept her how she is and strive to help her move through her cloud of grief over losing her dad. In my opinion, *Not If I See You First* meets four of Heim's criteria: the accuracy of information, the literature quality, the book confronting the disability portrayed, and the book not "using" disabled characters. For example, the assistive technologies/devices Parker uses are accurate to what a blind/visually impaired teenager would use in the 'real world'; the book is easy to read, humorous, and presents well the many emotions that teenagers experience related to friend/family relationships and romance; Parker confronts her disability by running on the track and field team; and no character "uses" Parker's disability for their own gain. Although there are still examples of some disability stereotypes throughout the novel, most of which Parker defies simply by being Parker. Similarly, this text meets several of Carroll and Penny Rosenblum's (2000) criteria, such as the book having characters who attend public school and have contemporary teen experiences; the family and peers of the character with visual impairment act realistically toward that character; and the family and teachers expect the character with visual impairment to be a successfully independent person. However, the book does not have characters with congenital sight loss or low vision—Parker is the only one mentioned to be blind and her blindness is adventitious; the book does not cover issues specific to teens with visual impairments in the 21st century (such as Parker being a non-driver and wishing to drive); and the story resolution does not involve a cure for the visual impairment.

Perhaps unsurprisingly at this point, the author of *Not If I See You First,* Eric Lindstrom, does not state his disability status nor any research he conducted in the author's note (if any), prior to writing this book. He mentions having several conversations with Saralyn Borboa from the National Braille Association and explains that the Unified English Braille system is what Scott and Parker use to write to each other. Though I read on his website that he has acknowledged his own struggles with mental illness in two separate blog posts. While admirable for his ability to share his mental health diagnoses with the greater world in the promotion of his second novel, he does not share the same disability as the protagonist in *Not If I See You First,* which again robs a disabled person from writing and publishing their own story, on their own terms, in their own way—by braille or regular print.

Results and Discussion about Use of Ableist Language

Before presenting my results, I wanted to briefly mention that the ableist words/phrases I was looking for did change as I conducted my content analysis. Originally working from L.X.Z. Brown's (2018) list of ableist words/phrases, I added some of my own words/phrases to the final list (such as *basket case*) as I read each book, since each novel uses ableist language differently. Some of the numbers may be inaccurate due to human error, such as my miscalculation or oversight. Also, in not all instances were these words/phrases used in a derogatory manner toward a disabled character; however, that does not eliminate the bias and prejudice these words/phrases carry. First, I will present my results from each book individually, and then compare and contrast the results to see which ableist words/phrases overall were the least and most frequently used. To be considered "most frequently used," I considered words/phrases that had 5 or more uses; while for "least frequently used," I considered words/phrases that were used between 1-4 times. Words that had zero usage were not included in the final results.

The Ables

The following tables illustrate some of the ableist language/phrases I observed in *The Ables.* Table 1 shows the most frequently used ableist words/phrases, while Table 2 shows the least frequently used ableist words/phrases. I am not including ableist words/phrases that were used zero times (for example, the phrase *basket case*). In total, I found 61 examples of ableist words/phrases in *The Ables.*

Table 1: Most frequently used ableist words/phrases in "The Ables"	
Word	*Number of times used*
Crazy	9
Disabled	8
Disability/disabilities	8
Idiot	9
Stupid	6
TOTAL	40

Table 2: Least frequently used ableist words/phrases in "The Ables"	
Word	*Number of times used*
Craziest	1
Cripple	3
Crippled/Crippled by	3
Delusional	1
Dumb	1
Freak/Freaks	2
Gimp	1
Handicap/Handicaps	2
Handicapped	1
Idiots	1
Insane	1
The phrase, "Sacrifice myself blindly"	1
Special Education/Special Ed	2
Special needs	1
TOTAL	21

Blind

The following tables illustrate some of the ableist language/phrases I observed in *Blind.* Table 3 shows the most frequently used ableist words/phrases, while Table 4 shows the least frequently used ableist words/phrases. I am not including ableist words/phrases that were used zero times (for example, the phrase *basket case*). In total, I found 64 examples of ableist words/phrases in *Blind.*

Table 3: Most frequently used ableist words/phrases in "Blind"	
Word	*Number of times used*
Crazy	23
Stupid	19
TOTAL	42

Table 4: Least frequently used ableist words/phrases in "Blind"	
Word	*Number of times used*
Basket case	1
Blind faith	1
Blind leading the blind	1
Blind love	1
Blind rage	1
Craziest	1
Disabled	1
Freak/Freaks	2
Idiotic	1
Idiots	1
Insane	4
Invalid	2
Love is blind	1
Lunatic	1
Special	1
Special Education/Special Ed	1
Special Needs	1
TOTAL	22

Girl, Stolen

The following tables illustrate some of the ableist language/phrases I observed in *Girl, Stolen.* Table 5 shows the most frequently used ableist words/phrases, while Table 6 shows the least frequently used ableist words/phrases. I am not including ableist words/phrases that were used zero times (for example, the phrase *basket case*). In total, I found 25 examples of ableist words/phrases in *Girl, Stolen.*

Table 5: Most frequently used ableist words/phrases in "Girl, Stolen"	
Word	*Number of times used*
Stupid	13
TOTAL	13

Table 6: Least frequently used ableist words/phrases in "Girl, Stolen"	
Word	*Number of times used*
Crazy	1
Dumb	2
Freaky	1
Handicap/Handicaps	2
Handicapped	3
Idiot	1
Retard	1
Retarded	1
TOTAL	12

Love and First Sight

The following tables illustrate some of the ableist language/phrases I observed in *Love and First Sight.* Table 7 shows the most frequently used ableist words/phrases, while Table 8 shows the least frequently used ableist words/phrases. I am not including ableist words/phrases that were used zero times (for example, the phrase *basket case*). In total, I found 14 examples of ableist words/phrases in *Love and First Sight.*

Table 7: Most frequently used ableist words/phrases in "Love and First Sight"	
Word	*Number of times used*
Stupid	6
TOTAL	6

Table 8: Least frequently used ableist words/phrases in "Love and First Sight"	
Word	*Number of times used*
Blind and deaf	1
Blind leading the blind	1
Crazy	3
Dumb	1
Special Needs	1
TOTAL	8

Not If I See You First

The following tables illustrate some of the ableist language/phrases I observed in *Not If I See You First.* Table 9 shows the most frequently used ableist words/phrases, while Table 10 shows the least frequently used ableist words/phrases. I am not including ableist words/phrases that were used zero times (for example, the phrase *basket case*). In total, I found 69 examples of ableist words/phrases in *Not If I See You First.*

Table 9: Most frequently used ableist words/phrases in "Not If I See You First"

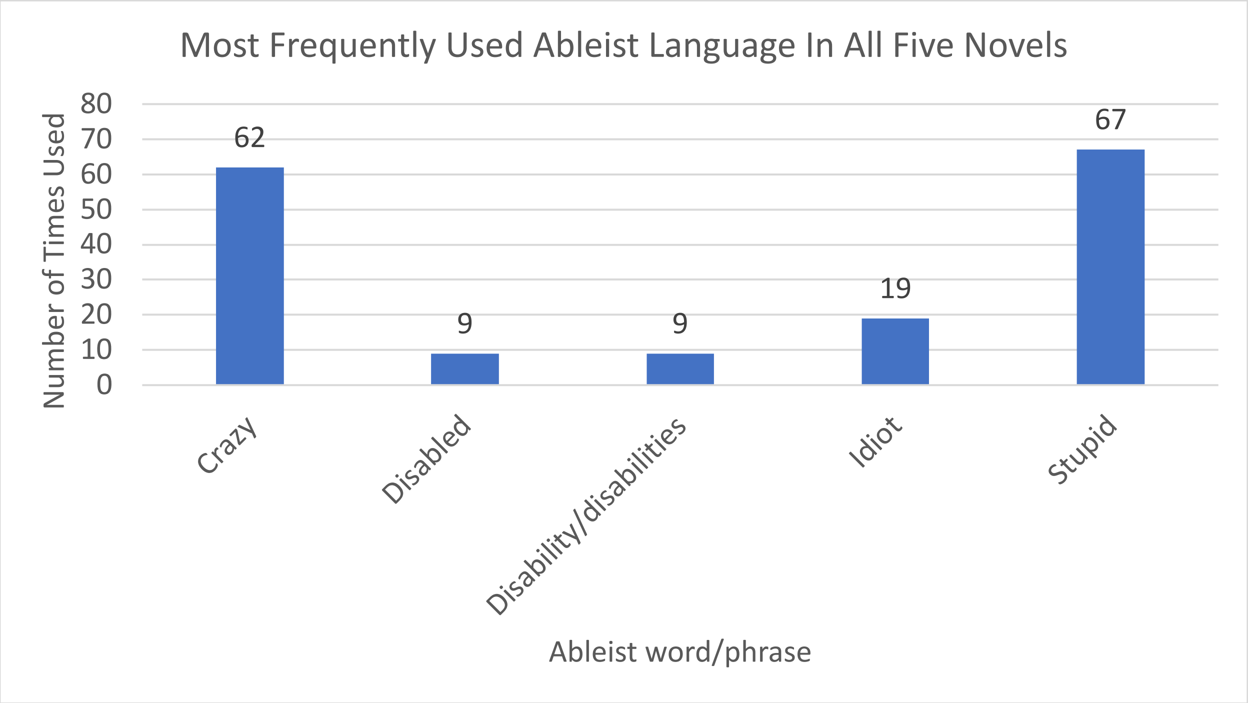
Word	*Number of times used*
Crazy	26
Idiot	9
Stupid	23
TOTAL	58

Table 10: Least frequently used ableist words/phrases in "Not If I See You First"

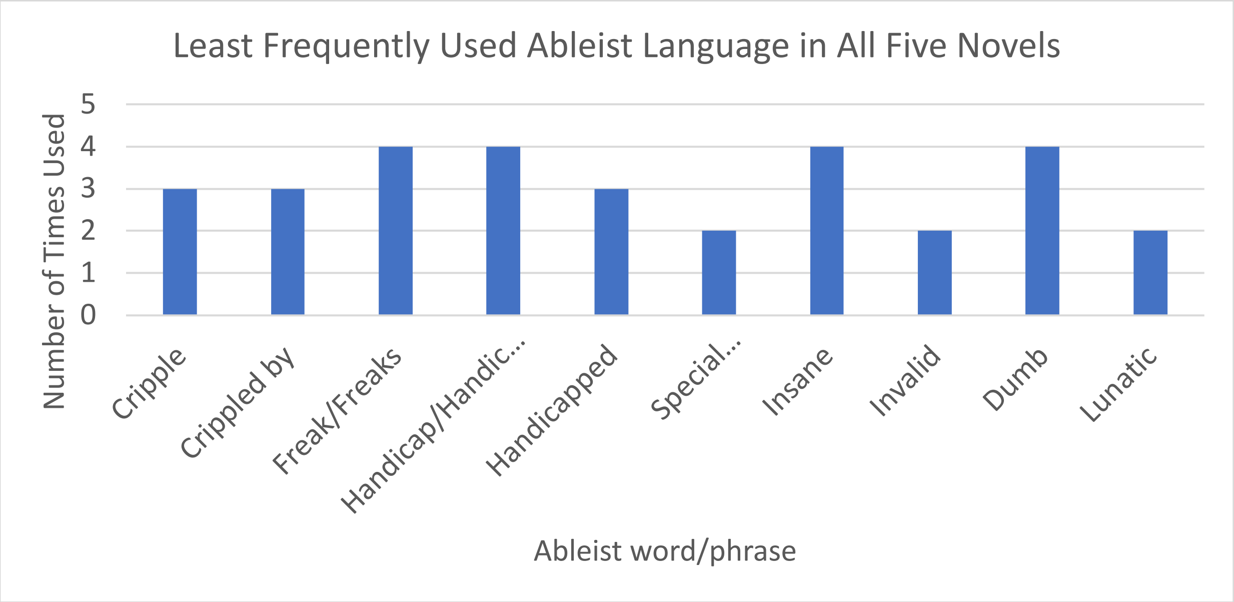
Word	*Number of times used*
Blind, not deaf	1
Craziness	1
Disability/Disabilities	1
Dumb	2
Freak show	1
Idiots	1
Insane	1
Lunatic	2
Turn a blind eye	1
TOTAL	11

The following graphs compare the most frequently used ableist words/phrases (Graph 1) and the least frequently used words/phrases (Graph 2) across all five novels. Graph 3 illustrates the total amount of ableist language used in all five novels. To create these graphs, I used Microsoft Excel to input the most/least frequently used words/phrases from each novel. For Graph 2, I only included words/phrases that were used twice or more in each book.

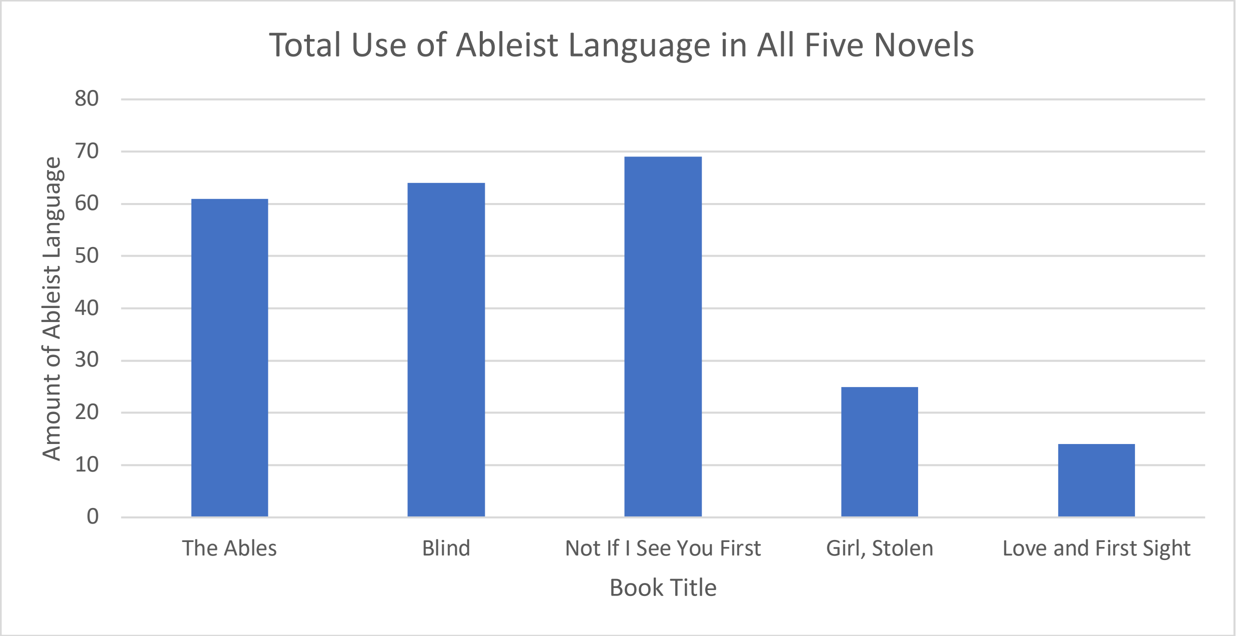
Graph 1: Most Frequently Used Ableist Language in All Five Novels



Graph 2: Least Frequently Used Ableist Language in All Five Novels



Graph 3: Total Use of Ableist Language in All Five Novels



These results indicate that the use of language truly matters when writing about minority characters in literature, such as characters with disabilities. Using words such as *crazy, idiot,* or *stupid* may seem like the perfect fit for describing a character's emotion, action, or thought at one particular moment, but that does not take away these words' insidious meanings, nor eliminate the sordid history behind them. Originally, these words were used to describe the so-called 'outcasts' of society such as people with disabilities--people that looked, spoke, learned, acted, thought, or even lived differently than the majority. As mentioned in the literature review, these people were often sent away to institutions by their family members where they received more maltreatment at the hands of those supposed to protect them.

The continued use of ableist words/phrases in these young adult novels only perpetuate the implicit biases, stereotypes, and beliefs of disabled people being unintelligent, incompetent, and uncooperative in a society where their unique attributes and experiences are shunned. Especially in the K-12 school setting, these words can be used as slurs against disabled students, and twist nondisabled students' understanding of disability, further separating the two groups of learners instead of bringing them all together. In order to remedy the use of ableist language in our society, school librarians, educators, and authors alike can take several steps to educate their students/readers about this kind of language. Perhaps the easiest step is to begin an open and honest conversations with students about these terms, their histories, and the implicit biases or opinions these words convey. For example, the novels analyzed in this content analysis could be a starting point for an engaging discussion about disability representation in various media (tv shows, films, music, literature). Other steps include locating print or digital resources to find new words/phrases to use in writing that are not ableist. Thinking critically about one's intended use of the word itself can be eye-opening as it causes the student or author to consider their word choice now and later. Likewise, school librarians can actively seek out fiction titles that contain little-to-no usage of ableist language, and proudly display them in book displays, through booktalking, or even integrating the titles into instruction throughout the schoolyear. While a timely process, the reward is sure to be great as nondisabled and disabled students can grow in their understanding and empathy of others' differences and have opportunities to positively develop their identities.

School and Public Library OPAC Results

School District A

I first started my research for this section looking at School District A. School District A is a public-school district located in a suburban area serving grades PK-12. The district serves over 12,000 students. The majority of the 88,000 people living in the suburb identify as White (68%), Asian (11%), Black (10%), and two or more races (3%). According to data I found, 4.2% of students identify as having a disability. For this district, I was unable to identify how many schools had their own school library/media coordinators (SLMCs).

Using the school district's website, I identified School District A as having two alternative schools, four middle schools, and three high schools, for a total of nine schools. For the first book, *The Ables,* I found only one middle school—A5—that had a singular print copy. For *Blind,* there were two print copies, one at alternative school A1 and the other at high school A7. For *Girl, Stolen,* there were again two copies in print, one at middle school A5 and the other at high school A7. For *Love and First Sight,* I found zero print or digital copies available at all nine schools, and for *Not If I See You First,* there was only one print copy at middle school A4.

School District B

School Districts B and C are more closely related in terms of demographics and geographic size. School District B is a public-school district located in an urban area serving grades PK-12. There are about 300,000 residents, 42% of whom identify as White, 37% as Black, 13% as Hispanic/Latino, 5% Asian, and 2% two or more races. This district serves almost three-times the population size of School District A, with

32,000 students. Again, 4.2% of students identify as having a disability. Data showed there are about 47 school library/media coordinators (SLMCs) across the district.

Because School Districts B and C serve so many students compared to School District A, it took me longer to identify which schools were middle schools, high schools, or alternative schools. Using the school district's website, I counted twelve alternative schools, nine middle schools, and four high schools, for a total of 25 schools. For the first book, *The Ables,* I found zero print or digital copies in all 25 schools. I had better luck finding copies of *Blind* in print, one at high school B23 and the other at high school B25. The book that had the most copies throughout the district was *Girl, Stolen,* with one print copy at alternative school B11; seven print copies at middle schools B13, B14, B16, B17, B18, and B20; and two print copies at high schools B24 and B25. Middle school B14 had two copies. The second book that had the most copies throughout the district—four total—was *Love and First Sight,* with one print copy at middle school B20, two print copies at high school B23, and one print copy at high school B25. Conversely, I found only two print copies of *Not If I See You First,* which were available at middle schools B15 and B19.

School District C

The final school district I looked at is one of the biggest public-school districts in the state of North Carolina. With a population of over 1 million residents, 60% identify as White, 20% as Black, 10% Hispanic or Latino, 7% Asian, and 3% as two or more races. The district serves over 160,000 students in grades PK-12 in urban, suburban, and rural locations. There is a slight increase of students with disabilities, at 4.6%, and about 5 times more school library/media coordinators (SLMCs) than School District B, leading the way with 202 librarians. Using the school district's website, I counted seven alternative schools, thirty-nine middle schools, and twenty-nine high schools, for a total of seventy-five schools. I want to quickly mention here that for this school district, I had more trouble accessing school library OPAC data as I was unable to access all of the data at one time using Follett Destiny's "Narrow your search by… Location" function that I was able to use with School Districts A and B. So, some of the data in this section may not be entirely accurate or missing, which I take responsibility for.

For the first book, *The Ables,* I found there to be zero print or digital copies throughout all seventy-five schools. There were seven total print copies of *Blind* at alternative school C3; middle school C31; and high schools C47, C50, C55, C70, and C71. Like the data I gathered for School District B, the book with the most copies throughout School District C was *Girl, Stolen,* with thirty-nine total print copies. Three print copies were available at alternative schools C2, C3, and C5; twenty-seven print copies were at middle schools C7, C8, C9, C10, C12, C13, C14, C15, C16, C23, C24, C25, C29, C30, C34, C36, C38, C39, C41, C42, C43, and C46; and ten print copies were at high schools C48, C50, C56, C58, C61, C65, C69, C71, and C73. Some locations had more than one copy such as schools C15, C24, C25, C30, C39, C42, and C61. The book with the second-most copies, *Not If I See You First,* had thirteen total print copies spread across two alternative schools, C3 and C7, and high schools C50, C51, C55, C56, C58, C59, C60, C70, C71, and C73. The book with the third-most copies was *Love and First Sight,* with six print copies at middle schools C8, C16, C30, C40; two print copies at high schools C58 and C70; and one digital (e-book) copy at middle school C9, for a total of seven copies.

In my opinion, the data collected both about book copies and copy type (print, digital, or large print) at each school district mirrored the data I found for each school district's corresponding public library system, as explained below.

Public Library A

Expectedly, Public Library A is the smallest of the three public library systems I studied as the town where the school district is located in only has one municipal library that serves its 85,000 residents. This library is unique in that it does not partner with other local public library organizations for any type of interlibrary loan service. I was happy to see that there was one print copy of *The Ables* available; one print copy of *Blind;* and one print copy of *Girl, Stolen.* For *Not If I See You First* and *Love and First Sight,* the library had two copies of each book, one in print and one in digital format. *Not If I See You First's* digital format was an audiobook, while *Love and First Sight's* digital format was an e-book.

Public Library B

Compared to Public Library A, Public Library B has eight branches across the area. I included a "Public Library B: General" section as while I conducted research, I found that some book copies were in digital formats, so they did not have a precise "branch" to call home; instead, they were in the digital hub of the entire library system's OverDrive website. OverDrive is a web-based library service that public libraries can use to store electronic or audio copies of the same titles they may have already on their physical library shelves.

In my opinion, Public Library B fell a bit short when it came to the amount of print or digital copies of all five books. For example, for four out of the five books—*The*

Ables, Blind, Girl, Stolen, and *Love and First Sight*—only had three or less print copies each across all eight branches. *The Ables* had no print or digital copies whatsoever at all eight libraries. However, for *Not If I See You First,* Public Library B's "General" section had three digital copies available to any patron via OverDrive—two e-book copies and one audio-book copy—and three separate branches, E5, E6, and E7 had one print copy each, for a total of six copies.

Public Library C

As expected, Public Library C was the library system with the most branches as it has the largest population of the three locations I studied. For this public library, I also included a "Public Library C: General" section as some items were available in digital formats such as some digital items from Public Library B. This public library in particular has twenty-three branches, almost three times the number of branches serving Public B's population. I was quite pleased to find that several Public Library C branches had fifteen total print copies of *The Ables*, located at branches C1, C2, C3, C4, C6, C14, C17, and C18. Branches C1, C2, C3, C4, C6, and C14 had two or more copies each. The second-most popular book this library system had was *Love and First Sight,* with thirteen copies spread across eight different branches. Four digital copies were located in the "Public Library C: General" location as there are two audiobook copies and two e-book copies. Branches C2, C3, C4, C14, C15, C18, C21, and C22 had one or two print copies maximum. The third-most popular book was *Not If I See You First,* with twelve total print copies available at nine different branches—branches C2, C3, C4, C6, C12, C15, C18, C19, and C20. Branches C2, C3, and C7 had two print copies each. Meanwhile, the least two popular books were *Blind*—with only five print copies at four different branches, C2, C3, C6, and C18—and *Girl, Stolen,* which actually had zero print or digital copies at all twenty-three branches. I was surprised to find that there were more copies of *The Ables* rather than *Girl, Stolen* because my research showed that *Girl, Stolen* is much more popular in school and public library collections than *The Ables* in both types of library collections.

School and Public Library OPAC Discussion

These OPAC results indicate that school and public librarians are curating materials that are representative of minority populations such as characters with disabilities. Children and teens—and to a further extent, young adults or even adults—who attend, work, or visit these school districts or public libraries can take full advantage of reading materials that literally present a different viewpoint of the 21st century world. By acquiring these materials into their collections, librarians and patrons alike can grow in understanding and empathy of these character's unique struggles due to their blindness/vision impairment. Especially for children or adolescents who identify as blind/visually impaired, know someone who has that particular disability, or are curious about what it is like to live with a disability such as blindness/vision impairment, there is assurance that books dealing with this topic may be available at either their school or public library on a regular basis, which can aid in these youths' ability to form Positive Identity Development and be used for bibliotherapeutic purposes.

It is admirable that Public Libraries B and C had some of the five books available in print and digital formats, as that provides more equitable access to these texts that a wider population can take advantage of. E-books and audiobooks are quickly becoming the "new" way to read as technology is advancing--why bring a paper copy when you could grab your Kindle or a pair of headphones? However, the lack of digital texts and texts in large print *both* at school libraries and public libraries contradicts this idea of accessibility since regular print texts are not legible by all people. With the typical font-size of published print books ranging anywhere from sizes 10 to 14 font, this creates a barrier between those who can comfortably read those font sizes and those who require a bigger font size or line spacing that large print uses, typically size 18 fonts. These results also indicate that these books may not be wanted or needed in nontraditional formats (large print or digital) by majority of patrons, young and old, because of whom the librarians *think* may want to read them; or the simple fact that new books are constantly being published and what is popular today, may not be popular tomorrow, especially with adolescents, so why waste the library budget on acquiring materials in expensive formats?

Likewise, this data does not show *how* these books are being utilized in the daily operations of school and public libraries. I am curious to know if the librarians who purchased these books planned to use them in any sort of instructional or programming capacity. Are these books just sitting on the shelves, or are they on a book display or recommended reading list somewhere? Are librarians actively promoting these books—and disability literature in general—through regular book talks, reader's advisory, and educational and/or recreational activities through partnerships with classroom teachers or community organizations? Unfortunately, I was not able to interview any librarians to ask these questions and get answers. I also was not able to view the checkout history of each individual book to see how popular it may be in circulation, just the fact that these libraries did or did not have a copy of the book and what format(s) of the book they had, if any. In summary, this research shows that librarians are slowly but surely striving to diversify their school and public library collections in terms of disability representation, but the complete lack of certain texts that accurately showcase blindness/vision impairment--such as *The Ables* and *Love and First Sight*--in some library collections is glaring.

Conclusion: Disability as Counter-Story

Over the past fifty years, disability representation in literature has slowly become more commonplace on school and public library shelves. Social justice movements in the 2010s like *#OwnVoices* and *#WeNeedDiverseBooks* encouraged authors and readers of all ages, backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences--such as authors/readers of color and authors/readers with disabilities—perhaps for the first time that their voices and lived experiences mattered. That their counter-stories deserved and should be told to as many people as possible, for as long as possible.

The five young adult novels critically analyzed in this thesis brought to light the idea of the counter-story through contemporary representations of blindness/vision impairment. Each author took certain risks when deciding how to describe and narrate the lived experiences of their adolescent disabled character(s), as each blind/visually impaired character discussed above—Phillip, Emma, Cheyenne, Will, and Parker—is unique in several aspects like their disability diagnosis, intersectionalities, use of person-first-language versus identity-first-language, and emotion towards their disability/other disabilities. Throughout these stories, each character faced several contemporary teen experiences that are similar to those experiences of adolescents with or without blindness/vision impairments today. For example, when I was an adolescent, I remember having fears and worries related to dating, family/friend relationships, and my self confidence/self-esteem in relation to my disability. Some authors like Rachel DeWoskin (*Blind)*, April Henry (*Girl, Stolen*), and Josh Sundquist (*Love and First Sight*) conducted active research with blind/visually impaired teenagers/adults, and/or consulted national organizations for the blind such as The Chicago Lighthouse to educate themselves on what it is like to be a disabled teen today. While other authors like Jeremy Scott (*The Ables*) and Eric Lindstrom (*Not If I See You First)* were moved by their own experiences with disability to take on the challenge of a disability they did not have.

Likewise, the accessibility of these novels at three local North Carolina school districts and public library systems indicates that librarians are paying attention to the importance messages behind these counter-stories, and how these messages relate to the growing diversity in the populations they serve. Some titles like *Not If I See You First* and *Girl, Stolen,* were more popular at certain public library systems than school districts, and vice versa. Because of this disparity in library collections, it is imperative that school and public libraries continue to maintain collaborative relationships so that K-12 students have as much equitable access to materials as possible through interlibrary loan. This is especially important when considering what format(s) the book is available in as some public libraries only had electronic copies of a title available, while others only had regular print copies, and no libraries (school or public) had large print copies of any title. These results demonstrate why it is beneficial to get to know the exact demographic details of the population your library serves, as you may be unintentionally excluding a percentage of readers, such as disabled K-12 students, from being able to access and read counter-stories in the format(s) most accessible and equitable for them.

Despite these authors' dedication to telling these narratives as realistically as possible, there are still faults in the counter-storytelling. Unfortunately, the characters from every novel fit into at least one disability stereotype identified by Rueben and Strauss Watson (1989), met only some of Heim's (1994) criteria, and also met only some of Carroll and Penny Rosenblum's (2000) criteria about blindness/vision impairment. Common themes of blind/visually impaired characters feeling pitiable/pathetic, like a burden to their nondisabled peers/family, as "stupid" or as an "invalid" because of their disability and their (in)ability to accomplish certain activities such as driving only promotes the continued use of ableist language and the harmful stereotypes of being disabled or knowing someone who is disabled in the 21st century. If these stereotypes and language are not confronted in an appropriate, timely manner by trusted adults in these young readers' lives, such as librarians, educators, and authors, these outdated and harmful words/beliefs will continue to permeate every aspect of our society.

However, I believe these texts' flaws are also their greatest strengths. These novels can and should be used by librarians and educators at the school and public library settings to inform and encourage readers of all ages, backgrounds, interests, and experiences to pick up a book every once in a while that tells a different story than their own. When a reader picks up a book like *The Ables* or *Blind* for the first time, they are not only opening their minds to diverse viewpoints but their hearts as well. These novels can easily be incorporated into classroom, school-wide, or community-wide discussions about tolerance, difference, and acceptance; especially in trying political times right now as people across the world fight for justice and equity. Disability is no exception to injustice and inequality; people with disabilities continue to be marginalized on employment, housing, education, and socioeconomic levels.

Obviously, where we go from here now as librarians, educators, authors, and readers matter. When deciding what titles to add or weed from a library collection, it is imperative we circle back to the questions, “Whose stories are we telling? Whose counter-stories are we *not* telling? *Whom* is telling these stories or counter-stories?” Remember, only one novel out of the five analyzed above was written by an author with a disability, and that author did not share his main character’s same physical disability. In my opinion, it is not enough to just write or publish these books dealing with marginalized topics like disability; or add them to our collections to spend the remainder of our budgets. It is imperative that these stories be written by *and* about people living and dealing with these marginalized topics on a daily basis. If we truly want literature in our school and public library collections to act as Rudine Sims Bishop’s “mirrors, windows, and sliding-glass doors,” we first have to acknowledge the counter-stories of the people standing in front of those mirrors, windows, and sliding-glass doors, waiting for their chance to break the glass.

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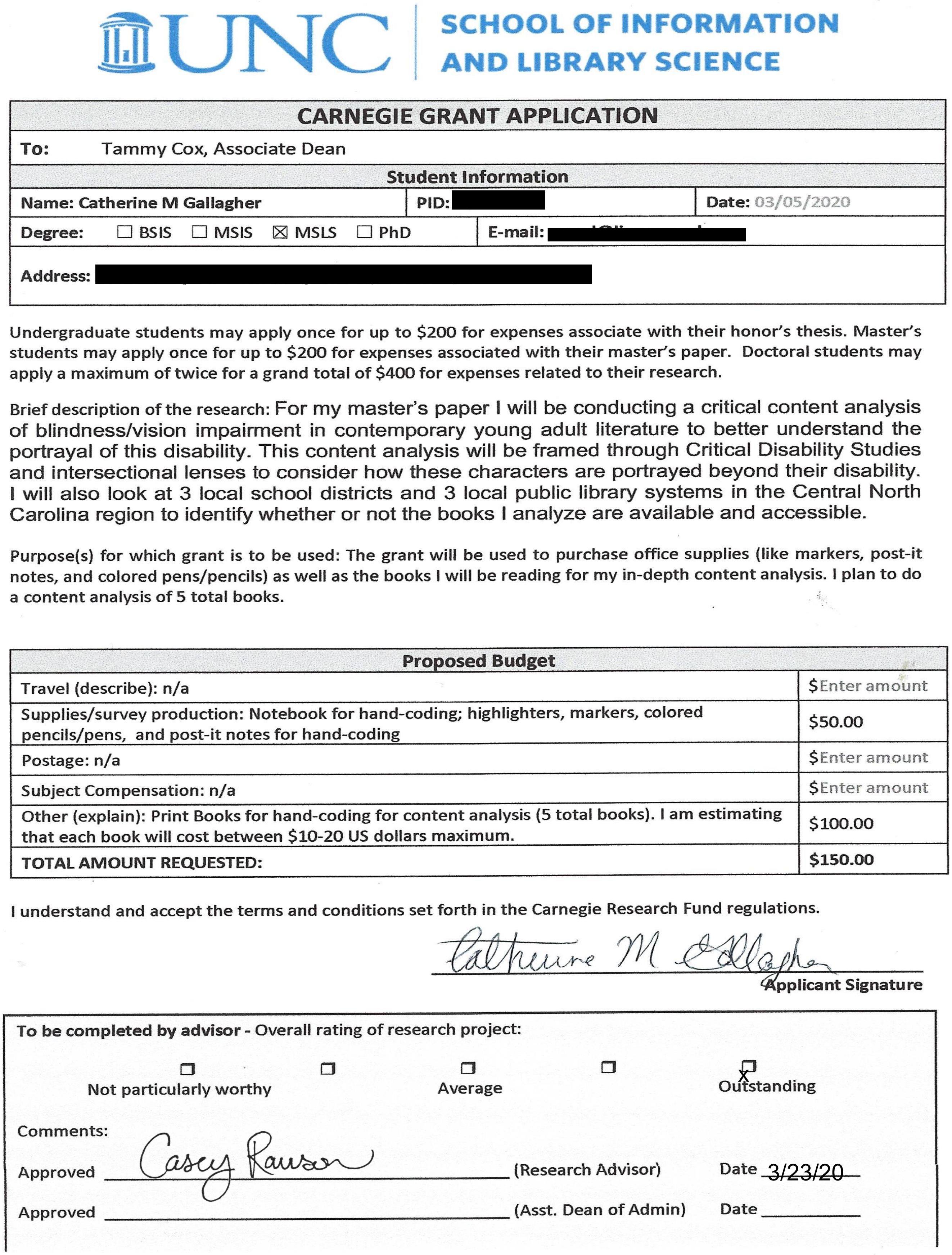
Appendix A: Carnegie Grant Application



UNC SCHOOL OF INFORMATION AND LIBRARY SCIENCE

CARNEGIE GRANT APPLICATION

To: Tammy Cox, Associate Dean

Student Information

Name: Catherine M Gallagher	**PID:** [redacted]	**Date:** 03/05/2020
Degree: ☐ BSIS ☐ MSIS ☒ MSLS ☐ PhD	**E-mail:** [redacted]	

Address: [redacted]

Undergraduate students may apply once for up to $200 for expenses associate with their honor's thesis. Master's students may apply once for up to $200 for expenses associated with their master's paper. Doctoral students may apply a maximum of twice for a grand total of $400 for expenses related to their research.

Brief description of the research: For my master's paper I will be conducting a critical content analysis of blindness/vision impairment in contemporary young adult literature to better understand the portrayal of this disability. This content analysis will be framed through Critical Disability Studies and intersectional lenses to consider how these characters are portrayed beyond their disability. I will also look at 3 local school districts and 3 local public library systems in the Central North Carolina region to identify whether or not the books I analyze are available and accessible.

Purpose(s) for which grant is to be used: The grant will be used to purchase office supplies (like markers, post-it notes, and colored pens/pencils) as well as the books I will be reading for my in-depth content analysis. I plan to do a content analysis of 5 total books.

Proposed Budget

Travel (describe): n/a	$Enter amount
Supplies/survey production: Notebook for hand-coding; highlighters, markers, colored pencils/pens, and post-it notes for hand-coding	$50.00
Postage: n/a	$Enter amount
Subject Compensation: n/a	$Enter amount
Other (explain): Print Books for hand-coding for content analysis (5 total books). I am estimating that each book will cost between $10-20 US dollars maximum.	$100.00
TOTAL AMOUNT REQUESTED:	**$150.00**

I understand and accept the terms and conditions set forth in the Carnegie Research Fund regulations.

Catherine M Gallagher
Applicant Signature

To be completed by advisor - Overall rating of research project:

☐ Not particularly worthy ☐ ☐ Average ☐ ☒ Outstanding

Comments:

Approved Casey Rawson (Research Advisor) Date 3/23/20

Approved ____________ (Asst. Dean of Admin) Date ________