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Finding Nemo, Findng Dory, Finding Ourselves: How and Why We Teach Our Children to Think About Disability

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Abstract

My project, a critical thesis titled "*Finding Nemo, Finding Dory,* Finding Ourselves: How and Why We Teach Our Children to Think About Disability," investigates how representations of disability within children's media transcend these texts and contribute to our society's construction of disabled subjects. By first looking at historical traits of children's literature in *Grimm's Fairy Tales* and *The Trumpet of the Swan*, I establish that the didactic function of this genre reproduces the values of the cultures in which they are written while it also attempts to instill social ideals that will guarantee 'progress.' Representations of disability in these texts teach children how to think about disability and, thus, inform how future generations will treat people with disabilities. My project culminates in an examination of the popular contemporary films *Finding Nemo* and *Finding Dory*, stories wherein all of the major characters are disabled. In these analyses, I synthesize the fields of cultural, film, literacy, and disability studies to conclude that, when children can identify disability in the films, something that is not in itself guaranteed, they do not see wholly progressive portrayals of disabled subjects; instead, these visual narratives continue to dis-able real people by promoting characterizations that teach viewers to understand disabilities as abnormalities that Other people, mark them as different, and require a cure. I argue that, in order to really overcome prejudice, we must become conscious of what our media actually teaches children about disability.

Table of Contents

Table of Illustrations

Introduction

On a whim, I decided to see *Finding Dory* when it came out in the summer of 2016. My parents had taken me to see *Finding Nemo* when it had come out in 2003, and I was excited to revisit something from my childhood. Sitting in that darkened theater, I was struck by something that I had overlooked as a child of about six or seven: Why had I never before realized that disability was such a central component of this story? This was when I first became interested in representations of disability in children's literature. It was hard for me to believe that I had completely missed a conscious recognition of this theme when I was a child. A critical awareness revealed what a general audience, my previous self included, had missed. It also led me to question what kinds of ideas about disability did I, and so many other children, unwittingly internalize. I could not stop thinking about why I had not identified disability as a feature of the film, especially since disability was something that had some bearing in my life.

In my family, we never outright discussed how my sister had a cognitive disability. It was something that I knew and noticed in my everyday interactions with her, but it was never something that we talked about. Like in both *Finding Nemo* and *Finding Dory*, we never said the word 'disability,' even when my sister went through the legal process of recognizing, of claiming, her disability. That experience of seeing *Finding Dory* forced me to change my vocabulary—for my own life and for how I approached narratives. I was seeing disability more than ever, and I wanted to understand what misconceptions I had about disability and where they had come from. This is where my project began.

My thesis looks at how our media really teaches children to identify parts of the world and how this is a matter of prevailing social norms. It is situational, not an objective standard, so it is open to change. My project asks: What do children *actually* see when literature and film

represent disability? A grounding tenet of my work rests in the idea that representations do not remain images or ideas; instead, they lay the foundation for how we learn to think about the world and how we learn to think about the other people in it. In order to understand how our society views people with disabilities and why this includes prejudice, we must understand how we really teach our children to gaze at them. What we might identify as tolerant or inclusive messages actually tend to perpetuate ignorance about disability.

One of the major obstacles of my research has been settling on a definition for 'disability.' While definitions may be practical, tools that determine exactly what it is we talk about when we do discuss disability, they are also reductive. They collectivize disability, as well as the persons who have them, in order to simplify and guide our discourse. Disability is not really that simple—and neither are the experiences of people with disabilities. Representations, too, are not that simple. So I abandoned my search for a comprehensive definition and instead chose to focus on different facets of disability in each chapter, embracing this complexity rather than avoiding it. Most scholars tend to agree, at the very least, that disability should be defined "as caused by both impairment and exclusion," which relates to the models for conceptualizing disability that I discuss in my second chapter (Daniels et al. 79). These two qualities are the starting point for my discussion of disability. While working through the question of defining disability, I realized that I must, unfortunately, clarify what people mean when we talk about 'ableism.' Ableism, most generally, is prejudice against people with disabilities and is a system of thought that "assumes that some people (and bodies) are 'normal' and superior while other people (and bodies) are 'abnormal' and inferior, and it entails institutional discrimination on the basis of this distinction" (Berger 14). This term comes up in my writing when I address the ways

in which literature and film reinforce or seek to overturn this way of thinking. Regardless, I clarify what facet of disability I address in each analysis I perform.

When I was figuring out how to define disability, I grappled with another question: How do we even discuss disability at all? Our use of language is fundamentally ideological, so I deliberated for a long time about how to address the people who have disabilities. There are several possibilities: the disabled, disabled persons, people with disabilities, etc. Each term has its problems. I have shied away from using 'the disabled,' and the reductive collectivizing that comes with it. In a few cases, I do include this term in quotation marks to address its use within discourse and how it does connote certain prejudices. When conducting my research, I encountered that some people reject the term 'disabled persons' and the implication that disability must become the primary determinate of someone's identity. Given that I write about a similar issue in how my third chapter, I tend to avoid this term as well, although I do still use it at times for the sake of clarity. Ultimately, I most often employ what seems like the least contested term, 'people with disabilities' (p. w. d.), even though I recognize that neutrality is a doomed hope.

Having addressed the issues with defining and discussing disability, I must now turn to the question of 'progress.' This is a fundamental concept in my project, and a large portion of my first chapter tackles the question of how children's literature specifically allows a society to imagine it. As such, when I use the word 'progress,' I do not always mean it as 'progressive,' something aligned with the political left. The social values encoded in the *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, for example, do not necessarily match this definition. In general, when I use the term 'progress,' I mean only to express how a society envisions the values that they attempt to inculcate into the children reading. When I begin to analyze *Finding Nemo* and *Finding Dory* in my last two

chapters, the word ‘progress’ does begin to take on this specific political meaning. This is partially because these films were made after “The disability rights movement has gone through different phases, since its origins in the 1970s” and the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 (Shakespeare 3). Disability was incorporated under the banner of progressivism. My writing addresses this change and the instability of ‘progress.’

I look at representations of disability and the idea of progress in three ways. In my first chapter, “From Punishment to Defect: Historical Constructions of Disability in Children’s Literature,” I primarily use the fields of cultural studies and children’s literary studies to question how representations of disability reflect a society’s values. By analyzing the didactic function of children’s literature and how morals are expressed in these stories, readers can identify how a society imagines ‘progress.’ Specifically, I incorporate Stuart Hall’s theories of identity construction when examining the historical examples of “Cinderella” from the 1869 English translation of *Grimm’s Fairy Tales* and E. B. White’s *The Trumpet of the Swan* (1970).This foundation clarifies the role that children’s literature plays in discursively creating identities, which I then extend to my analyses of *Finding Nemo* and *Finding Dory*. I argue that, historically, a society’s vision of progress does not always mean progressive understandings of disability, and the representations of disabilities in children’s literature construct prejudice by creating subordinate social positions for these people.

My second chapter, “Finding Disability in *Finding Nemo*,” looks at how the audience’s literacy affects whether or not children can even consciously identify the representations of disability in *Finding Nemo* (2003). By focusing primarily on visual and narrative literacies, this unit looks at the problems that arise with making disabilities visible, when only physical impairments can be directly accessed in this way. I look first towards the medical and social

models of understanding disability and then to David T. Mitchell's and Sharon L. Sndyder's concept of narrative prosthesis in order to reveal the tension between visible and non-visible representations of disabilities within this film. Despite the visual medium, the narrative emphasizes Nemo's physical disability, and this further renders Marlin's non-visible disability even more invisible. Ultimately, these portrayals of disability are what actually dis-able the characters of Marlin and Nemo, even as the narrative attempts to 'cure' the two's disabilities.

In my final chapter, "Difference, Disability, and Dory: The (De)Valuing of Cognitive Variation," I analyze *Finding Dory* (2016), the sequel to *Finding Nemo*. This chapter focuses on how, although it is impossible to comprehensively define disability, the association of disability with stigmatized ideas of difference underscores discourse on this subject. First, I foreground how our society imagines people with disabilities as the ultimate Other, and then I look at how contemporary media attempt to overcome these past biases. This film initially represents Dory's short-term memory loss in a way that reinforces this ableist perspective but only so that the film can model how viewers can conceptualize disability in positive ways, bringing value to this identity. However, as much as one might want to believe the film's promise of progress, the story actually falls short of conquering prejudice when it infantilizes Dory and reinstates stereotypes of people with disabilities.

My goal with this project is to expose and critique the problems in how we conceptualize disability, even in our contemporary discourse. As much as we value inclusivity and diversity, the messages expressed in our media prevent us from attaining this 'progress.' I hope that my writing reveals why we need to have a critical awareness of what we teach our children and, consequently, what future we choose for our world.

Chapter One

From Punishment to Defect: Historical Constructions of Disability in Children's Literature

Think back to when you were a child. Surely you had a favorite story, one that sticks with you even now, years later. These are not mere stories, objects that we discard when the last page turns or when the film ends. The books that we read as children continue to influence our lives as adults. On the subject of literature in general, not just that aimed at children, Wayne Booth argues that it has great persuasive power, that "We are what we have consumed; we take in whatever takes us in, and we are forever altered" (*Modern Dogma* 166). But children's literature is often explicitly didactic; these stories teach children how we want them to view the world—and the people in it. The values found in children's stories shape the generations that read them and the societies that they then form. This is how children learn how to treat people who the societies that produce these stories identify as different, so children's literature influences how a society imagines people with disabilities. In this chapter, I take a historical approach to analyze "Cinderella" (1869) and *The Trumpet of the Swan*, which reveals that representations of disability within this genre both parallel and make possible the identities ascribed to people with disabilities.

To understand the impact that children's literature has on the construction of different peoples in society, we must first examine how the emergence of children's literature coincides with the development of modern and contemporary notions of childhood. Zohar Shavit analyzes the instructive function of children's literature and claims that this genre is a recent invention, something that became popular only in the late nineteenth century (317). Western children's literature is a relatively new development because "Before children's literature could be written, 'childhood' itself had to come into existence" (Shavit 317). Of course, childhood had existed in

the most basic, biological sense, but adults within society had not previously considered children as too different from anyone else. The development of this distinction led to new advancements in psychology and social planning. Shavit acknowledges this consequence when she describes that "The period of childhood is considered the most important period in one's life, and an adult's behavior is often explained by his childhood experiences," meaning that, at this point in the nineteenth century, people began to emphasize the intellectual and moral development of the child (318). Changes in how society educated children would impact how adults thought or behaved. Western societies needed a literature that imagined children as its specific audience to augment these new strives in education, shaping children into proper citizens. People thought of the child "as a delicate creature who must be protected, educated, and molded in accordance with the current educational beliefs and goals. The way to shape children along these lines was first and foremost by the means of books" (Shavit 321). From its inception in the nineteenth century, children's literature was explicitly a tool that was meant to inculcate children to a society's set of moral standards. This is a trend that continues today with contemporary children's literature. Children's literature conveys ideology, particularly moral ideologies, so that children can grow up to become functional members of their society.[1] My analysis seeks to clarify the relationship that this moral didacticism has to constructions of disability.

Parents, as well as the other adults within the society that produces these stories, facilitate this process of social education. They produce and distribute the texts that emphasize what a

[1] Scholars theorize that all literature employs rhetoric and is therefore didactic. Jeffrey Walker looks at the ancient Greek epideikton, or epideictic, which was originally "identified with discourse delivered outside judicial and legislative forums," such as funeral orations or other speeches, but later "came to include everything that modernity has tended to describe as 'literature'" as the basis for this claim (7). Expanding this idea to our contemporary time, Walker postulates, "'epideictic' appears as what shapes and claims the basic code of value and belief by which a society or culture lives; it shapes the ideologies and imageries with which, and by which, the individual members of a community identify themselves" (9). I claim that this is especially true of children's literature, and Walker's ideas on ideology and identification echo my argument there. Wayne Booth reflects these ideas about persuasive literature when he writes that he is concerned with rhetoric that is "the art of probing what men believe they ought to believe" (*Modern Dogma* xiii). I argue that children's literature is the foundation for this normative belief.

society identifies as essential values. Perry Nodelman argues that "Children's literature began as, and has continued to be, a didactic literature, a way in which adults can teach children how to think about themselves and the world," implying that he sees parents and other adults as intentionally initiating the moral inculcation of child readers (7). Although he conceptualizes the relationship between text and audience in this way, reinforcing my claim that this has always been the explicit purpose of this genre, he does not find this particularly successful. Nodelman writes that adults read children's books "in terms of how they imagine children would identify. The wish-fulfillment expected then represents not what real child readers might actually wish for, but what the adults reading the book might wish for children—what they as adults would like children to desire" (9). This is the wish that we can teach children to succeed, to be better, to build a better society—even if that just means a society where everyone is accustomed to the previous generations' values. He proposes that parents choose books for their children based on what they think the children must know in order to match the values system of the society they live in. Ideally, this would prepare children to become successful members of their community. This rationale exemplifies the understanding that socialization is "a normatively regulated behavior, because socialization agents (e.g. parents, schools) must consider what is widely valued in the society and hence what can help the children become adaptive in the society" (Tam and Lee 176). Children's stories are another example of socialization agents, so they too reflect the aim of social preparation with their didactic power.[2] In this system, parents are simply the agents of societal organization. When an entire generation, not just individual children, receive this same moral training from pedagogical tools like books, it prepares a whole society for

[2] Importantly, Tam and Lee note that "Parents do not merely dub what they value into their socialization values" because they realize that the values that they were raised with will not necessarily prepare their children from their current or future societies (175). When choosing what values to pass on to children, parents envision an ideal society. This is where the illusion of 'progress' becomes apparent.

progress. Children's literature conveys institutionalized social systems and ideologies, even as it is the means for affecting social change.

This social organizational process transmits a society's ideology. This ideology may include a mere reproduction of a society's values or an attempt to intervene and replace these values with what one sees as superior ideas. Peter Hollindale elaborates on this idea, asserting, "Historical periods will differ in the forms of social growth they cherish, but it is an article of faith that the current period will be wiser than its predecessors" (9). This is the great hope of children's literature—that the moralizing education in these stories will ensure a better future. Parents alone do not attempt to instill these values, although they are some of the most direct and proactive agents of this change; instead, ideology permeates all aspects of society. Hollindale writes that there are three kinds of ideology conveyed in children's literature: the author's explicit beliefs, her unconscious assumptions, and the ideologies of her world. The author's own values are the "easiest to detect" because they are often expressed in overt "efforts to change imaginative awareness in line with contemporary social criticism" (Hollindale 11). The writer directly expresses this ideology in the lesson to-be-learned at the end of a children's story, which highlights the moral that the author wants her readers to internalize. Hollindale defines the second mode of ideology when he charges that "we must thus take into account…the individual writer's unexamined assumptions" and claims "that all children's literature is inescapably didactic" because of this passive ideology (12). This ideology includes the normative values within the author's society, ideas that she does not question and simply accepts as true. The distinction between the author's conscious intent and unconscious biases means that there can be ideological conflict or tensions in stories when "'official' ideas [are] contradicted by unconscious assumptions" (Hollindale 14). This potential for contradiction accounts for why a narrative arc

might convey different messages than the overt instructions in the same story. This also explains why, even when someone may think that literature or film teaches his or her child certain lessons, this may not be the case. When describing the last kind of ideological content, Hollindale instructs that "we must think in terms which include but also transcend the idea of individual authorship" (15). A story's ideology does not reflect just one individual. Hollindale clarifies this when he writes that "A large part of any book is written not by its author but by the world its author lives in," or, that the author communicates a whole discourse that creates ideologies, even as they reproduce them (15). These ideologies constitute a worldview, something that informs or organizes a reader's whole life. Ideology evaluates, or gives value to, different concepts, so we construct subjects through the ideology in children's literature.

Ideology influences how authors represent different identities. These representations contribute to how we, as children and then as a society, imagine different people. W. J. T. Mitchell defines representation as "always *of* something or someone, *by* something or someone, *to* someone" (12, emphasis in orig.). In other words, representation creates communication between each side of this system: the representational object, the creator, and the audience. But this attempted communication leaves open the potential for breakdown since the encoded ideologies of the different people and objects within this system might contradict one another, which reflects Hollindale's worry about conflicting levels of ideology. This relationship is why Mitchell cautions that "representation, even purely 'aesthetic' representation of fictional persons and events, can never be completely divorced from political and ideological questions" (15). Ideologies pervade all aspects of the representational system. Fictional stories, especially children's fiction, grant entrance into a culture and require that readers navigate the social values inscribed within those cultural products. Children's literature, then, is an integral part of social

discourse. A Foucauldian analysis asserts that this kind of discourse means that "we become the individuals, the subjects that they make us" because of the power relationships that structure representation (Bové 58). Children engage in discourse when they begin to read and encounter these ideologies, and identity construction arises because of this.

Children's literature teaches its audience how to identify others through its ideological components. Once children enter into this discourse, they extend these identification processes to the world. Representations become real. On the subject of identity, Stuart Hall argues:

> identity emerges, not so much from the inner core of our 'one, true, self' alone but in the dialogue between the meanings and definitions which are *represented to us* by the discourses of a culture, and our willingness (consciously or unconsciously) to respond to the summons of those meanings, to be hailed by them, to step into the subject positions constructed for us by one of the discourses ("The Centrality of Culture" 219, emphasis in orig.).

In other words, representations are not simply fictional imaginations of people. They are part of a discourse that real people engage in, so they affect the real world. Moreover, this discourse makes identity possible. Identities are not simply represented through texts—they are also created through them. This is because "material from the 'outside', from popular culture, can *supplement* our identity – *intervening* in our identity, offering new points of identification, and playing complex roles in the construction of identity" (Bowman 61, emphasis in orig.). Representation allows one person to relate to another. The representational object thus constructs the identity of a subject, an individual, a group of people. It is instated as reality. This process is especially important for children, who are just starting to make sense of the world. The ideologies that inform representations effectively create the world and the people in it. Stories

contribute to how children learn about the other people in their world, and they assign identities in their relationships, the hierarchies, that they go on to create based on this ideology. As Hall writes, identities "emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally constituted unity" ("Who Needs 'Identity'?" 17). When Hall claims that discourses create subject positions in "The Centrality of Culture," he means that cultural phenomena like reading children's fiction opens up the possibility for identification. When the reader encounters a represented object—in the cases I consider, this is a character with a disability—she is able to define herself and the other people she knows in relation to that representation: I am not like *that*, but I am like *this.* In this way, the subject positions created by representation are the point of entrance into a social world. The moral imperatives encoded in representations of disability teach children how to construct the disabled subject within their society.

Hall suggests that identities change throughout history, and an analysis of different periods' depictions of people with disabilities reflects this. The changing treatment of disabled persons correlates to evolving conceptualizations of disability, and these understandings mirror the shifting values system that is reproduced within children's literature. Because children's literature has a didactic focus that encourages the identification and construction of different subjects, tracing historical portrayals of disability in the 1869 English translation of "Cinderella" and *The Trumpet of the Swan* reveals how these textual representations reflect social attitudes about disabilities. I argue that, although it may be the aim of children's literature to instill progressive[3] values in children by including moral ideologies, these values link up to, or even

[3] As I explain in my introduction, I mean this in the general sense of moving towards progress and not—at least, not yet—in the political sense of the liberal left. This term takes on this meaning in the next chapters, when I begin to write about these contemporary films. In fact, the later Disneyfication of "Cinderella" with the 1950 film

create, constructions of disability that reinforce the prejudice that subordinates people with disabilities.

The *Grimm's Fairy Tales* exemplify early forms of children's literature and, therefore, the initial ways in which societies began to inculcate children. The fairy tales are succinct and have a direct, obvious moral lesson at the end. This overt moralizing models for child readers what actions are considered right or wrong in that society. "Cinderella" demonstrates this didacticism by appealing to the perceived symbolic quality of disability, characterizing it as a punishment to deter misbehavior. By the end of the story, children can easily identify the socially successful Cinderella as the moral exemplar, while the two stepsisters are disabled and function as the cautionary tale of what happens to those who defy social norms. The story characterizes Cinderella as the paragon of virtue, the foil to the two stepsisters. At the beginning, the story overtly describes Cinderella as "good and pious," even though "she looked dirty" because she "was forced to sit in the ashes on the hearth," whereas the two sisters "were beautiful and fair in the face, but treacherous and wicked at heart" (Grimm 87). In addition to setting up the binary between Cinderella and her stepsisters, this paradigm reveals a central theme in the story: the relationship between external, physical appearance and internal, ethical character. Initially, this relationship is one of contrast. Cinderella has a tarnished outward appearance, but she is a "pious" person despite this, a dynamic that opposes how the sisters are first described. However, by the end of the story, the relationship between physical appearance and personality is reversed for each character. Cinderella demonstrates her moral goodness through her behavior, exemplifying the social values of religious and filial piety when she cries and prays at her mother's grave three times a day (Grimm 87). The child reader can identify these behaviors as

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demonstrates the shifting perception of what constitutes progress and what values are considered suitable for children. Notably, disability is completely taken out of that later story.

socially validated, because Cinderella seems to be rewarded for them. Cinderella attends the prince's festival for three nights, and is vested with "a dress which was more splendid and glittering than she had ever had before, and the slippers were all golden" (Grimm 91). This extravagant attire has made Cinderella appear so beautiful that her family cannot recognize her. This new wardrobe symbolizes how Cinderella's correct behavior becomes rewarded, since her outward appearance now reflects her virtuous nature, so this moment reinforces the values system of the late nineteenth century.

The sisters undergo a similar transformation when their inner moral failings become physically manifested. The chiasmic shift, Cinderella's elevation and the sisters' falls from grace, occurs when the prince announces that he is looking for the owner of the golden slipper that was left behind on the last night of the festival. The two sisters are happy, "for they had beautiful feet," but this does not last long (Grimm 91). Remarking on the beauty of the feet emphasizes the horror of the sisters' punishment when they decide to mutilate their feet in order to make the slipper fit. One sister cuts off her toe, while the other cuts off her heel (Grimm 92). Ultimately, the prince realizes the sisters' deception and marries Cinderella. Through this social repositioning, the story portrays the sisters' disabilities as a consequence of their moral degeneracy. The sisters have become deformed as a result of their actions—their greed, their mistreatment of Cinderella, their lies, and so forth—demonstrating to children that this kind of "treacherous" behavior will not be tolerated. The parallel created between external physicality and internal, ethical failures is not the sisters' only punishment, though; the story explicitly ends with an announcement that "the two sisters were smitten with blindness as a punishment for their wickedness" (Grimm 93). These are the very last words of the story, signaling that children should take this as the most important part and reflecting Hollindale's first mode of ideology.

The moral lesson is that socially unacceptable misbehavior will be punished, and the story portrays disability as that punishment. Hall concludes that representations of identity like this one is "why the boundaries of cultural and normative regulations are such a powerful way of marking out 'who belongs' (i.e. who does things in our way, according to our norms and meanings) and who is 'other', different, outside the discursive and normative limits of our particular ways of doing things" ("The Centrality of Culture" 234). Within this cultural discourse, disability is this mark of Other, of who does not belong. The prohibitive disabling of the two stepsisters provides insight into how children in the nineteenth century were taught to perceive disability in this way.

In this story, disability does not just signify narrative completion. If that was the case, then the sisters would have been suitably punished when they cut off parts of their feet. The narrative's arc would be satisfied with this comeuppance since, ostensibly, the sisters have been punished for their wickedness, and having this done of their own hands shows that it is a direct result of their actions. The children who read this can see it as a warning that behaving immorally will harm them. The extra sanction of the blindness conveys that the sisters are not simply responsible for themselves as individuals. They, like the children reading, are members of a larger society, and so they are responsible for acting in ways that are acceptable within that public. The story enforces an ideology in order to maintain social order. When they act greedily, torment a member of their family, and lie to gain status, the sisters model prohibited behavior. The punishment of blindness reinforces to the children reading that these actions cannot, and will not, be tolerated within society. It effectively casts the two sisters out of the community, because that is what was done to the people with physical disabilities at the time of this story. Henri-Jacques Stiker analyzes the history of societal understandings of disability and claims that "The

nineteenth century…will be dominated by aid in the form of reclusion," which was accomplished by secluding people with disabilities in the family structure of the home or in newly available institutions like asylums (110). He also remarks that the later nineteenth century began rudimentary rehabilitation efforts that actually "had no pretension to integrate the disabled into ordinary life" (Stiker 108). This would be the aim of the twentieth century. Regardless, at the time that this story was published in English, disability meant social exclusion. By characterizing disability as this ultimate, socially dis-abling punishment, stories like "Cinderella" teach children to think of disability and disabled persons as abnormal and morally defunct. Making disability indicate a person's moral failings rationalizes the act of marginalizing them and preventing them from participating in that society.[4] The way that children's literature constructs the disabled subject thus translates into how people determine the role of those subjects in society.

Although we might like to think that great ideological progress would be made in a century, E. B. White's *The Trumpet of the Swan* (1970) shows that this is not necessarily the case. This book demonstrates how the twentieth century expanded the process of rehabilitation, but the narrative captures a discourse that continues to associate disability with shame. This novel operates in the same tradition of children's fiction that conveys moralizing lessons through the representation of people with disabilities.[5] The story begins with a boy, Sam Beaver, stumbling across a nest of Trumpeter Swans, which are named after the loud, easily identifiable sound that they make. The protagonist, a swan called Louis, hatches, and his family later learns

[4] Stiker comments that the late nineteenth century saw the creation of special institutions for the blind, who, like most people with any sort of disability, "were classified in a kind of subhuman category" (107). This aid was not a true emblem of progress; people with disabilities were still considered "subhuman" and these institutions were "still very far away from what we, today, would call reintegration and redeployment" (108). In fact, they reinforced exclusion, removing disabled persons from the larger society.

[5] Unlike the brief story "Cinderella," *The Trumpet of the Swan* is around 200 pages in length. According the sales description from Amazon, this book is written for children ages eight to twelve because of its more advanced reading level; however, although the intended audience of this book may have been slightly older than that of "Cinderella," I show that this novel still fits within the genre and the inculcating function of children's literature.

that he is mute. This means that he cannot make the calls that the Trumpeter Swans are known for. Louis embarks on a journey that the story characterizes as a way to move past his disability. He first learns to read and write in English and then to play the trumpet. Sam Beaver overtly states the moral of this story: "Louis is following a dream. We must all follow a dream" (White 176). Throughout the narrative, child readers see that Louis exemplifies the moral of working hard and never giving up when attempting to achieve his dream of fitting in. By the end of the story, Louis' hard work is rewarded when a beautiful swan, Serena, fall in love with him. This lesson may seem inspiring, but the representation of Louis' disability reflects problematic attitudes that are not actually so far removed from what "Cinderella" conveys about disability.

The story does not outright call Louis' muteness a punishment for a moral failing, but it does invoke this idea when portraying it as something abnormal or immoral. When Louis' parents are first able to recognize that Louis is mute, the story characterizes his disability as a deformity, and his family makes him feel insecure, guilty, and ashamed for it. Louis' father, simply called the cob since that is the name for a male swan, becomes offended when Louis' mother first tells him that she thinks Louis might be mute. He exclaims, "Goodness! What are you getting at? Do you wish me to believe that I have a son who is *defective* in any way? Such a revelation would distress me greatly" (White 36, emphasis in orig.).[6] In addition to overtly describing Louis as defective, meaning broken or useless, the cob implies that Louis' disability is a slight against him as a father, that he is a failure for producing "defective" offspring. This interaction conveys that disability is something to be ashamed of, something inherently wrong. If "the socialization of the child is that she learns to operate as a subject within various discourse

[6] The cob's dramatic reaction matches White's characterization of him as someone vain who enjoys "showing off" or "speaking in fancy phrases and graceful language" (12; 26). Adult readers might be able to see him as a negative model—of how *not* to react to disability—and see this as something acceptable to show to children; however, as Nodelman argues, most young children will have not reached "an awareness of irony," something that even adults struggle to be literate with, and will assume this reaction is a positive model (13).

types, each of which establishes its particular set of subject positions, which in turn act as constraints upon those who occupy them," then the cob's reaction constitutes a very concerning discourse wherein people with disabilities remain examples of moral failure (Stephens 55). This story teaches children that disability is defect, that disability is a deficiency. When children are taught to think this, they grow up to imagine people with disabilities as broken, not fit for normal society. The discourse that we internalize as children creates this identity for real people with disabilities, and this is how we create prejudice in the world.

When Louis' father confronts his son about his disability, he reinforces the association of this identity with shame. The cob pulls his son aside and tries to force him to speak. When Louis cannot make a sound on the first try, the cob chastises, "'Perhaps you're not making enough of an effort,'" and compels him to try again three more times (White 40). This implies that Louis is responsible for being mute because he does not try hard enough to speak. This way of thinking creates the mindset that disabled people could no longer be disabled if they put more effort into rehabilitation. The continuance of disability then signifies deeper moral failings—laziness, incompetence, and so forth. The cob proceeds to lament, "'I guess it's no use. I guess you are dumb'," which reinforces this attitude (White 40). This is also an incredibly insulting and hurtful statement. When the cob sees that his son is obviously distressed by this accusation, he tries to backpedal and explain that "Words sometimes have two meanings," and that dumb can mean unintelligent or mute (White 41).[7] Although the cob claims that he meant to say that Louis is mute, this exchange is still very damaging, for Louis and for the reader. The cob tries to distinguish between the two meanings, but the reader cannot be trusted to recognize these meanings as discrete, if they even are. This worry is compounded because the cob's earlier

[7] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, in 1970, dumb was used to describe muteness, but it was, and still is, more commonly a colloquial way of calling someone ignorant or unintelligent.

reaction casts serious doubts on his sincerity. Dumb is not at all a far reach from defective. With these interactions, the damage is done: Children are taught that people who have disabilities are unintelligent, defective individuals. This is the way that disability and prejudice become constructed in the world. Discourse becomes action. People learn to treat people with disabilities as if they are dumb, and these actions are what define a subject within the world. This interaction between Louis and his father instigates Louis' search for an effective means of communication, something that will help him fit in with the rest of his community.

Louis' search for a way to circumvent his muteness reflects the contemporary social attitudes about the need to rehabilitate disabilities. His attempt to learn how to use the trumpet is a rehabilitative effort that he hopes will allow him to overcome the stigmas of defect and dumbness that his family places on him. Stiker argues that rehabilitation "implies returning to a point, to a *prior* situation, the situation that existed for the able but only postulated for the others. In any case, reference is to a norm" (122, emphasis in orig.). Within the very structure of this discourse, the language that we use to discuss disability, the disability is identified as an abnormality. This is the problem with rehabilitation rhetoric. Disability is still constructed as wrong, a problem that is made more grievous since the desire to rehabilitate is also the wish that "the disabled person can be among us and pass unnoticed" (Stiker 131). This regulating, normative understanding of identity is an ideological component seen in *The Trumpet of the Swan*, especially since the desire to pass unnoticed, to hide, is associated with shame. The explicit goal of rehabilitation, therefore, contains an ideology of condemnation. Regardless, Louis first attempts to find a way to communicate, despite his muteness, by learning to read and write in English. His rationale for this demonstrates the consequences of his family's earlier reaction: "'If I'm defective in one respect,' he said to himself, 'I should try and develop myself

along other lines" (White 53). The way that he thinks of himself as defective reveals that Louis has clearly internalized the prejudice that he has faced. Additionally, this thought process expresses the shame he feels for his disability, that he thinks of it as something that he has to make up for. Learning to write does not work for Louis, though, since "Words on a slate meant nothing to [his family]. They couldn't read" (White 68). Louis cannot integrate into his community—they will not let him. His family will not even try to find a way to communicate with him, and his disability makes him too different to be socially accepted by other swans. The effort he goes through in attempting this rehabilitation remains unreciprocated, and the results of it Other Louis even more since swans do not traditionally have the need to read and write. This social isolation models behavior for the children reading the book as well. Children see that disability, even when one tries to rehabilitate it, is permanent, and they learn that these efforts to pass will never be enough.

However, based on this story, children learn that people with disabilities need to at least attempt rehabilitation if they want to have any hope of being accepted into their community and not face immediate condemnation as Other. This rejection initially happens with Louis when he falls in love with a swan, Serena, who thinks that "A Trumpeter Swan that couldn't trumpet was a bust as far as she was concerned" (White 73). Not only does this send the message that there is something inherently wrong or abnormal about those who have disabilities, but this interaction conveys that people with disabilities have an ultimate flaw that makes them unworthy of acceptance. Again, this ideology justifies the social isolation of people with disabilities. Louis' father, seeing that his son is depressed by Serena's rebuffs, decides to steal Louis a trumpet so that he can learn to make sounds. The need to become 'normal' is thus emphasized. Regardless, the trumpet does not make everything normal or right. First, the cob is overcome by guilt over

stealing the instrument, thinking to himself "What a miserable fate for a bird of my excellent character and high ideals! Why did I do this? What has led me to commit this awful crime?" (White 80). Of course, both the cob and reader soon realize that he did this for Louis, which places responsibility solely on Louis and his disability. The story depicts the cob as a criminal because he needed to fix his son. This whole interaction emphasizes that disability is, or at least leads to, a moral failing.[8] Louis even accepts this sentiment, resolving to go off and find a job in order to pay off the trumpet and absolve his father of any guilt. He does learn to play the trumpet and gets paid to do it, acquiring both skill and fame because of that. But the alleged success of this rehabilitation comes at a cost. Louis cannot play all of the notes on the trumpet because his webbed feet cannot press one button without pressing the others. In order to better reach the buttons, Louis instructs Sam to "'Take a razor blade and slit the web on [his] right foot" (White 113). Louis mutilates himself, sacrificing some of his ability to swim, in order to better master the trumpet. This presents disability as something to overcome or compensate for at all costs, even at the risk of bodily injury. Consequently, if people with disabilities cannot do this, they deserve to be shamed. This story identifies people with disabilities as willfully deficient and, thus, unfit for society.

By the end of the story, Louis reunites with Serena and has a chance to prove that, because of his skills with the trumpet, he is now a capable, worthy swan. Louis is staying at a zoo in Philadelphia, playing the trumpet to earn money. Serena is swept into the zoo due to a wild storm, and Louis devises a plan to earn her affection, thinking, "Back home on Upper Red Rock Lake, I was without a voice; she ignored me because I could not tell her of my love."

[8] These depictions of disability are not incidental. According to Marion Glastonbury, White "reflects that one should keep abreast of what the children of the country are reading because it is a mirror of the age" (3). If he sees this mirroring as a consequence, or even the purpose, of children's literature, then *The Trumpet of the Swan* is no different. This moralizing of disability reflects contemporary ideology.

(White 152). Louis characterizes his everyday existence as a lack—that he "without" something and "cannot" perform certain actions. The choice to use negative words shows how he has internalized the conception of his disability as deficiency. This moment also sets up a contrast between how Louis used to be before his rehabilitation with the trumpet and how successful he is now that he has it. The reader also sees that Serena is a symbol of acceptance and normality; if she approves of Louis, all of his sacrifice is worth it. He can finally be accepted into his community if his transformation has worked. And Louis is successful. As the narrator suggests, he earns Serena's love in a "moment of triumph for a young swan who had a speech defect and had conquered it" (White 158). However, this triumph seems hollow because the arc of rehabilitation implicates disability as something that must be hidden, something that must be overcome. We see this ideology continuing in our contemporary media like *Finding Nemo*. The book's conclusion expresses even more ableist prejudice when Louis and Serena try to leave the zoo and head back home. The zookeeper wants to keep Serena there, and Louis enlists Sam to help broker a deal with him. Sam proposes to Louis that "'In every family of cygnets, there is always one that needs special care and protection…would you be willing to donate one of your cygnets, now and then, if the Zoo needs another swan for the lake?" (White 173). Louis agrees to this deal, which effectively undermines any understanding of Louis' rehabilitation as progress in constructing the identity of people with disabilities. This moment exemplifies the potential for ideological conflict that Hollindale warns of. In Louis' family, he would have been the cygnet that would need "special care and protection." Louis' willingness to give up the children who are like him—disabled—subverts any admiration one can have for Louis' hard work. His agreement expresses that disabled persons are better off isolated from their families and from the rest of

society. This demonstrates how this story proposes no real advances in how to conceptualize disability and instead reinforces the Othering of people with disabilities.

These two test cases, "Cinderella" and *The Trumpet of the Swan*, exemplify how children's literature throughout the past few centuries has used ideology to inculcate children, instructing them on how to identify disability as punishments and defects. This ultimately places children in a discourse that defines people with disabilities as immoral or as unfit for society. The construction of this identity is also then the construction of prejudice, and this is not just a matter of historical analysis: It is a process that continues today. Contemporary children's films continue to convey ideology on disability to detrimental effects. Although she thinks that it is reductive to assume that children are simply passive receivers of ideology and not their own moral agents, Monique Wonderly does agree that "the children's film genre is a surprising apposite tool for aiding the moral instruction of pre-adolescents" (1). This is why my project proceeds with analyses of *Finding Nemo* and *Finding Dory*. Just like how "Cinderella" and *The Trumpet of the Swan* mirror, and even inform, historical constructions of the disabled subject, so too do these contemporary films. They provide insight into how we really instruct our children to construct disability and, with that, construct the future for our society.

Chapter Two

Finding Disability in *Finding Nemo*

A child watches a quirky film about animated fish—but what does she really see? Disability pervades *Finding Nemo* (2003); however, the inclusion of disability guarantees neither recognition on the part of viewers nor accuracy of representation on the part of the filmmakers. In this film, a young clownfish named Nemo ignores his father Marlin's warnings about the dangers of swimming in the open ocean. As a result, a dentist abducts Nemo. Marlin, joined by another fish named Dory, searches the entire Pacific Ocean in order to reunite with his son. The film struggles to present disabilities, even though all three major characters are disabled: Nemo by his shortened fin, Marlin by his post-traumatic stress disorder, and Dory by her short-term memory loss. The film makes it difficult to identify and then understand the different characters' visible and non-visible disabilities. This is especially true for the children who watch this film and do not necessarily have the same degree of literacy as adult viewers. A general audience for children's film, the children themselves as well as their adult parents, struggles to see how disability functions in *Finding Nemo*, if they can even see it at all.[9] In this chapter, I analyze how the film's narrative dis-ables Nemo more than the visual depiction of his disability does, and this ends up obscuring Marlin's disability as well. This proliferates prejudice instead of offering the audience new ways of imagining and treating people with disabilities.

In this analysis, I use the two primary paradigms for understanding disability, the social model and the medical model, which emphasize exclusion and impairment as the defining characteristics of disabilities. Our society, through its media, teaches people to conflate dis-

[9] A New York Times review from the film's release acknowledges that Nemo "was born with one fin smaller than the other" and that Dory has a "severe case of short-term memory loss," but the author characterizes Marlin only as "a well-meaning worrywart" (Holden E1). Notably, the author never once uses the word 'disability,' even when explicitly writing about it. This suggests that a general audience—and even the adults within it—does not see disability in the film, at least not consciously and that a critical response is necessary to make this visible to viewers.

ability and impairment. This perpetuates fundamental misunderstandings about and, consequently, the mistreatment of people with disabilities. The social model of disability holds that the social relations in which disabilities exist cause dis-ability. Jeffrey Blustein asserts that proponents of the social model believe that "there is nothing inherently disabling about having an impairment," and maintain that disability arises "solely from physical environments and social organizations that are inhospitable to people with impairments and that exclude them from effective participation in the economic, social, and political life of their communities" (575). Disability results not from an individual's physical, psychiatric, or cognitive impairment but instead from society's prejudice.[10] This view has largely replaced the medical model, which suggests that "There is something inherently disabling about having an impairment, at least a serious one, and no change in physical environment or the organization of social activity could give persons with an impairment the same opportunities that persons without impairments have" (Blustein 576). This position defines disability entirely through biological impairment. Under this view, a missing limb or psychiatric condition would dis-able someone as opposed to making her differently-abled and living in dis-abling circumstances. I argue, though, that these seemingly contrasting categories are too reductive when considered separately. [11] When analyzing contemporary representations of disability such as *Finding Nemo,* critics must see how elements of both models can explain these portrayals and what they really teach children about disability.

Finding Nemo presents characters' disabilities in ways that reinforce both models, but they are not wholly sufficient for understanding disability in this film. Depictions of visible

[10] This is why I distinguish between disability, how our society commonly identifies impairments, and dis-ability, what actually limits someone's capability. In the social model, these limits include social isolation, exclusion, antagonism, and so on.

[11] In this chapter, I use basic definitions of each model, but they are not monolithic views. Tom Shakespeare writes about the spectrum of opinions within each model in the introduction of *Disability Rights and Wrongs Revisited* and chapter "Materialist Approaches to Disability" within that book.

disabilities such as Nemo's fin align more closely with the medical model, whereas depictions of non-visible disabilities like Marlin's PTSD best match the social model since the audience can only "see" them through the ways in which the film tells the story. Because *Finding Nemo* is a story, an imagined reality, models of disability that are rooted in real-life experiences miss an integral part of how disability functions in this film: that it is a plot problem to overcome. This ultimately reflects a similar phenomenon to Louis' narrative of rehabilitation in *The Trumpet of the Swan.* The medical model promotes physical aids for this overcoming, whereas the social model prescribes a society-wide attitude adjustment. Neither model accounts for the kinds of spontaneous cures that are offered in *Finding Nemo.* This is the underlying problem of fictional representations of disability—that rehabilitation is not so easily done in real life.

Fictionalized portrayals rely on the audience's interpretive skills to see how stories ought to relate to real experiences. Visual narratives foreground visible disabilities but struggle to represent non-visible disabilities, what cannot be depicted with images and must rely on narration. Children must be able to identify and understand the nuances of what they see and what they are told, which is not easy when these two accounts may contradict each other. *Finding Nemo* tests what Sylvia Pantaleo calls multimodal literacy, an approach to understanding the world and the cultural products within it that "recognizes the availability and use of an array of modes—such as speech, writing, image, music, gesture, gaze, and posture—for communicating, representing and interacting within a culture" (114). Children must already have a substantial grasp on multimodal literacy to fully understand disability in films, but these children likely have not yet developed literacy in every necessary mode. Until someone is multimodally literate, she passively internalizes the ideology expressed through these representations. To interact with cultural constructions of disability in children's films, an

audience must be literate in three modes: visual, narrative, and social. Visual and narrative literacies are necessary to decipher representations of disability within the products themselves, and social literacy reflects the ability to reconcile these representations of identity in society's discourse. Pantaleo writes that "Visual literacy involves both cognitive and affective dimensions with respect to the reception and the expression of visual communications" (114). Visual literacy requires an understanding of the concepts and emotions invoked by details in images. Films are composed of stories as well as visuals, though, so children must also develop narrative literacy. Narrative literacy promotes children's:

> (1) understanding of narrative structure and the role of different parts of the plot in helping a narrative achieve its purpose…(2) understanding of the experiences represented in the story, including …feelings and relationships; and (3) understanding of the broader social and cultural themes explored in narratives, through which children can learn about dominant and/or desirable social values. (Zhang et al. 131)

First, children must be able to understand narrative constructs like plot. Then, they can grasp the emotional or conceptual content of it. After children acquire these first two understandings, they can see how these ideas echo or intervene in their society's ideology. Perry Nodelman elaborates on this definition of narrative literacy by looking at the different degrees of this literacy that adults and children possess. Nodelman's first stage of narrative literacy reflects a general grasp of what Zheng et al. identify in their first two points, and children acquire this as they encounter stories throughout their lives (7). With this and the transition from childhood to adulthood, people arrive at the second stage, which entails "coping with [narrative] divergences from the conventions they expect" (Nodelman 8). Nodelman observes that adult, critically aware students

in a graduate course he teaches are comfortable at this second stage.[12] This means that adults and children watch films with different levels of literacy, so adult viewers might pick up on ideas that could completely escape a child's notice—even though that child would internalize those ideas.

Combining visual literacy with narrative literacy allows the audience to construct meaning from a film's treatment of disability. Understanding cultural themes through narrative literacy helps instill social literacy, what Pantaleo alludes to when writing, "individuals construct understanding in specific social contexts" (116). Social literacy teaches the audience to understand how a film functions within the larger social discourse that identifies disability. Social literacy is an overt aspect of the parent-child relationship in regard to children's literature because parents choose media for their children based on the "need to prepare their children for social life as it exists in the present and in the future" (Tam and Lee 175). The representations of disability that children receive from *Finding Nemo* reinforce how adults want children to see and treat real people with disabilities. Finding disability in *Finding Nemo* with visual and narrative literacy forces us to construct it outside of the film as well.

While narratives impact how disabilities are represented, representing disability also shapes the structures of narratives. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder write about the relationship between disability and narrative through their thesis of narrative prosthesis, which they claim "is meant to indicate that disability has been used throughout history as a crutch upon which literary narrative lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight" (49). As my first chapter has shown, stories that include disabilities have

[12] Yet adults struggle with the third stage of narrative literacy, where readers can accept stories that do not "persuasively convey messages the readers agree with or would like children to agree with" (12). This last stage involves a consciousness of the didactic function of children's literature and a critical estrangement from it. Scholars who focus on the fields of children's literature and narratology might be more prone to encounter texts at this third stage, and my analysis relies on it. However, since my inquiry in this chapter focuses on how children and adults receive *Finding Nemo,* I typically refer to the first two stages when I use the term 'narrative literacy.'

functioned historically as moralizing tales and narratives of triumphant overcoming. This means that representations of disability become symbolic, which inhibits their ability to accurately reflect real people. Stuart Hall describes this when he writes that media "hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses" ("Who Needs 'Identity'?" 19). This is a kind of identity interpellation, meaning that representations like *Finding Nemo* create the foundations for how we see ourselves and others. But discourse on disability is structurally flawed. The symbolic rendering of disability compromises the possibility of treating real people with disabilities with respect as individuals because it undermines the specific experiences of disability in our world. Mitchell and Snyder identify the typical format of disability narratives:

> first, a deviance or marked difference is exposed to a reader; second, a narrative consolidates the need for its own existence by calling for an explanation of the deviation's origins and formative consequences; third, the deviance is brought from the periphery of concerns to the center of the story to come; and fourth, the remainder of the story rehabilitates or fixes the deviance in some manner. (53)

This rehabilitation, the plot's resolve to fix a character's disability, is the implementation of a narrative prosthesis. My analysis of *Finding Nemo* demonstrates that this arc does take place, but the film reimagines it. Mitchell and Snyder's analysis presupposes that disability constitutes a deviance from the social norm; however, in *Finding Nemo,* all of the major characters *are* disabled. In a sense, disability is the norm within the film. Why, then, does the plot compel the characters to overcome their disabilities instead of allowing this genre twisting to have its own representational power? Questions of literacy, the uncertainty of the audience's ability to even identify that the primary characters have disabilities, may compel the narrative to fall back on accepted, albeit problematic, forms.

Finding Nemo exemplifies the difficulty of *seeing* disabilities, especially non-visible ones, in film. Scholars writing about disability rarely address this film specifically, demonstrating the challenges of even a trained audience seeing disability in it, but Daniel L. Preston does argue that "the film *Finding Nemo* can be used as an excellent tool for helping students at all levels to start thinking about disability in different ways" (56). While Preston does briefly discuss the medical and social models for constructing disability, his paper conceptualizes this film as a pedagogical tool for college-level students. Presumably, this audience is at Nodelman's second stage of narrative literacy. He overlooks what I identify as this film's potential as a socialization tool for shaping children's understandings of how disability functions within our society. Preston also ignores the potential that children's films have for shifting prejudice into tolerance by presenting more accurate portrayals of disability. Moreover, when listing the characters in the film that have disabilities, Preston does not include Marlin and his PTSD (59). Even in an article that seeks to foreground disability and establish a discourse on it, disability remains partially invisible. The film deemphasizes Marlin's disability to the point that even scholars ignore it. I seek to fill in these gaps with my own analysis and reveal what exactly children internalize about non-visible disabilities.

The film's visual medium may allow the audience to see Nemo's disability, but the visuals do not dis-able him—the narrative does. By using Zhang et al.'s first two applications of narrative literacy, we see how this dis-abling occurs. Both the characterization, how Nemo interacts with characters like his father, and the plot, how the main conflict of Nemo's kidnapping is introduced and then resolved, socially construct Nemo's disability. However, the narrative actually implicates a dual injustice in this dis-abling. The fraught characterization of Nemo and Marlin's relationship dis-ables Marlin too, even as it conceals his PTSD. The

narrative thus subordinates Marlin's psychological disability in favor of Nemo's physical one by refusing to validate its existence as something separate from what dis-ables Nemo. I argue that, through visual and narrative literacies, the audience might see alternate understandings of disability beyond outright prejudice, but the film ultimately fails to move past inaccurate, damaging representations of disability.

The opening few minutes of the film test the audience's visual literacy since it illustrates the inception of both Nemo's and Marlin's disabilities. The first frame of the film depicts an expansive gradient of blue, interspersed with beams of sunlight. Marlin's awed voice is superimposed over this nonfigurative composition as he exclaims, "Wow-ee! Wow!" (*Finding Nemo* 00:00:57). The camera then pans left, where the figures of Marlin and his wife Coral swim, dwarfed by the open ocean on the right. At this moment, Marlin is excited by the possibility contained in this view. The film repeats this composition, what was once a hopeful vision, minutes later during the nighttime aftermath of the massacre of Marlin's wife and unborn children (see fig. 1). The overwhelming darkness of this image symbolizes the reversal of

Fig. 1. Marlin and Coral (left) and Marlin after attack (right); *Finding Nemo* 00:01:05 and 00:04:19; Directed by Andrew Stanton and Lee Unkrich, Disney/Pixar, 2003.

Marlin's earlier positivity. Marlin's wife and hundreds of their children are dead, and the only survivors are Marlin himself and a single egg, Nemo. Marlin floats again on the left side of the screen, but the large swatch of now-darkened ocean dominates the frame. The image of empty

ocean now symbolizes Marlin's loss since his anxiety has replaced his previous excitement. This is the initial trauma that provokes Marlin's PTSD, and the visuals imply that this attack also causes Nemo's physical disability since the sole surviving egg has a jagged scar on it. The emphasis on this physical imperfection shows how visual literacy invokes the medical model, which prioritizes biological abnormalities. The images in the film clearly depict Nemo's injury, but the subtlety of the repeated composition may conceal the development of Marlin's disability. Stephen A. Dewhurst and Martin A. Conway acknowledge that "picture processing enhances recollective experience," which they define as the "recall of details such as thoughts, feelings, sensory-perceptual experiences associated with the encoded event, and a sense of 'pastness'" (1089; 1088). This suggests that an adult audience could very well recall the repeated composition, but Dewhurst's and Conway's experiments did not account for children who are still in the process of developing visual literacy. Even if children can recall the repetition, they may not be able to infer *why* this repetition occurs. This obscures Marlin's disability, even as it highlights Nemo's.

The events surrounding Nemo's first day of school introduce the narrative layers that dis-able Nemo and Marlin. The story dis-ables Marlin by revealing elements of his PTSD, but it does so while concealing that he even has a specific, known disability. On the surface, the narrative portrays Marlin merely as an overly protective father. His disability is never outright mentioned. With a more attuned narrative literacy, the audience can see how the film first characterizes Marlin with the defining elements of PTSD. The audience sees Marlin's hyper-vigilance[13] in the dialogue with Nemo that marks a procedure he has for leaving the house:

[13] "…PTSD diagnostic criteria [exist] in six clusters: (A) exposure to a traumatic event (A1–A2); (B) re-experience such as flashbacks and nightmares (B1–B5); (C) avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing (C1–C7); (D) increased arousal such as anger and hypervigilance (D1–D5); (E) duration of symptoms (more than one month); (F) significant impairment in social life" (He et al. 131). My analysis shows that Marlin experiences most, if

Marlin: …What's the one thing we have to remember about the ocean?

Nemo: It's not safe. (*Finding Nemo* 00:06:54-00:06:57)

Before working up the courage to leave his home, he goes through a ritual of swimming outside of his home and going back inside three times. Because the film never openly acknowledges this anxiety, viewers may easily interpret this characterization of disability as Marlin just worrying over his son. Marlin's PTSD also socially isolates him, which we see when he is unable to interact with the other parents at the school (*Finding Nemo* 00:08:15-00:08:50). Marlin struggles to hold a conversation with the other parents. He fails to tell them a joke when they request him to, and he proceeds to only talk to his son after this. The *in*visibility of Marlin's PTSD is a product of the narrative's refusal to address it as a disability. The narrative also only suggests Marlin's psychological disability in order to more concretely define Nemo's physical one; the object or outlet of Marlin's PTSD is his son, which the film highlights when Marlin panics upon hearing that Nemo's class is going to the drop-off, the border between the populated community on the reef and the open ocean. Nemo and his friends float by the drop off, looking into the ocean with the kind of awe that mirrors Marlin's reaction to the ocean before he developed his PTSD (*Finding Nemo* 00:12:23). This parallel scene symbolizes the mediated access through which the audience can attempt to "see" Marlin's disability: It is inextricably wrapped up in a dis-abling portrayal of Nemo. We see the drastic change in Marlin, his anxiety and loss of worldview, best through a comparison to Nemo's experience.

This scene also demonstrates the two narrative components that dis-able Nemo, characterization and plot. The audience witnesses this dis-abling when Nemo and his friends see a boat in the ocean, and Marlin, having caught up to his son, tries to prevent Nemo from

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not all, of these criteria. I have already discussed A, and my analysis in this section includes C, D, and F as well. Marlin *does* have PTSD, and it *does* dis-able him.

swimming out to it. This interaction places rhetorical emphasis on Nemo's disability. Nemo swims to the boat to show that he is just as strong of a swimmer as any other fish. He wants to prove that he is not physically disabled by his "lucky fin," but Marlin refuses to accept this, shouting, "You think you can do these things, but you just can't, Nemo" (*Finding Nemo* 00:13:36-00:13:37). This remonstration comes right after he pleads with Nemo, "You know you can't swim well" (*Finding Nemo* 00:13:22). Importantly, the parent-child relationship modeled here ought to make adult viewers conscious of how they present disability to their children through this film. Regardless, misunderstandings about each other's disability characterize the tense relationship between Marlin and Nemo. The way that Marlin shouts about Nemo's disability emphasizes the physical disability of the fin, which distracts the audience and prevents them from recognizing how it also reveals Marlin's disability. The exchange shows that a perceived endangerment of Nemo triggers Marlin's PTSD, and it exemplifies the social relations that dis-able Nemo. In addition to the rhetorical emphasis, the composition of the scene highlights Nemo's disability and the social consequences of its construction. When the camera focuses on Nemo, it places him in the center of the screen, completely isolated in the ocean and against the backdrop of the darkened boat (see fig. 2). Nemo's visual separation from the rest of

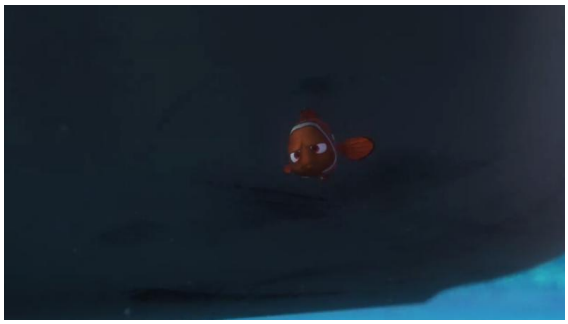

Fig. 2. Nemo separated from reef community; *Finding Nemo* 00:14:39; Directed by Andrew Stanton and Lee Unkrich, Disney/Pixar, 2003.

his community, since his school and family are located away from him on the reef, depicts the social isolation that arises when society fails to understand and accept people with disabilities. The camera perspective also emphasizes this since the camera first seems to be relatively close to Nemo, but, when the angle shifts to show him swimming back to class, the camera has zoomed out so that Nemo appears much smaller. This perspective also reveals the distance between him and the reef, which underscores the social distance that exists when characters foreground Nemo's disability. This isolation echoes Marlin's struggle earlier with the other parents. Beyond characterization, the film's plot also dis-ables Nemo since this moment is the set-up for the film's central conflict.

The narrative implies that Marlin is right—that Nemo *cannot* swim well—because Nemo is kidnapped right after this dis-abling discourse. Visually, the images on the screen never suggest that Nemo has actual trouble swimming, that his fin dis-ables him. Children who watch this film see Nemo swimming just as well as all of the other characters, but Marlin's claims displace this observation because "in order for [children] to become visually literate, they need explicit instruction" (Pantaleo 114). If children have not received such instruction, they lose sight of visual inferences when faced with contrary narrative evidence. Being told what to think overtakes one's own observations. Marlin's insistence and Nemo's subsequent capture compel children to see that Nemo is not like the other kids. He *is* different. Nemo's fin, or, more accurately, the discourse surrounding it, does dis-able him. Here, narrating impairments creates disabilities. The film vacillates between presenting disabilities through the medical and the social models with the different focuses on both impairments and exclusion. This reveals how the two paradigms promote limited potentials for imagining how disabilities really impact people when

understood separately, but the resolution of the plot's conflict continues to dis-able Nemo in accordance to the social model.

After he wakes up from his kidnapping, the film effectively cures Nemo's dis-ability when it becomes socially validated as what makes him exceptional. He finds himself in a tank at a dentist's office where he meets the other inhabitants, most notably a disabled fish named Gill. Like Nemo, one of Gill's fins is shortened, but, unlike Nemo's congenital condition, Gill acquired this disability later in life. After waking up, Nemo gets sucked up into a tube that connects to the tank's filter (*Finding Nemo* 00:29:40). He asks Gill to help free him, but Gill replies, "You get yourself in there, you can get yourself out." (*Finding Nemo* 00:30:00). He rejects Nemo's statement that he cannot swim well because of his fin, an argument that demonstrates how Nemo has internalized Marlin's reaction, and Gill cites his own impairment as proof that disabilities do not determine a person's capability. This encouragement shows how Gill is a foil to Marlin, someone who has just socially dis-abled Nemo. Additionally, the narrative sets Gill up in the role of Nemo's mentor, a foil to Marlin, presumably because of their similar disabilities. This collectivizing of physically disabilities denies the complexity of each character's individual relationship to his impairment, such as the differing circumstances of their developments.[14] However, the audience must normalize this generalization because this relationship supplants and corrects the misconception of disability offered in the first part of the narrative—that Nemo's disability makes him incapable. The conceptual improvement modeled by this arc in the film remains flawed, rooted in prejudice, but it is persuasive in its veneer of

[14] Stuart Hall argues that, in discourse, "there is the *production* of self as an object in the world, the practices of self-constitution, the relation to the rule, alongside the scrupulous attention to normative regulation, and the constraints of the rules without which no 'subjectification' is produced" ("Who Needs 'Identity'?" 26, emphasis in orig.). Identification means the relation to "normative regulation," which reflects the collectivizing tendency in representations of disability. Instead of individuating subjects, identity often homogenizes them.

progress. [15] The incentive to accept reductive representations of disability demonstrates how children's fiction can impart damaging social morals. Still, this resituating of Nemo's disability provides a slightly more positive understanding of disability. Nemo does get himself free because of his own abilities (*Finding Nemo* 00:30:28). He *can* swim well. He need not be dis-abled, and this shows the audience that we need not dis-able him or other people with disabilities.

The film's attempt to render disability valuable is not completely admirable or progressive, even though it seeks to displace stigma. The plot becomes what Mitchell and Snyder call a prosthesis, what rehabilitates Nemo's disability. Gill reveals that Nemo is the only one who can help him enact an escape plan because he is the only fish who is small enough to fit through the tube and get to the filter (*Finding Nemo* 00:38:50-00:40:02). Nemo can fit because he does not have the extra width of a large fin on one side, so, just as Preston claims, "Nemo is valued as important and capable—even special—because of his size and ability" (58). This is not a straightforward celebration of disability, though. The prosthetic success of Nemo's swimming suggests that his impairment can be overcome, as if it is an ailment to cure, and the re-enabling of his fin as exceptional reinforces this. Michael Bérubé describes this tension, claiming that "in the rendering of disability as exceptionality, the disability itself effectively disappears" (569). The transformation of Nemo's disability is effectively a disappearance, and the desire to make a disability disappear, like we saw in my previous chapter's analysis of Louis' rehabilitation, implies that it is an affliction. Regardless, the narrative's characterization of Nemo's disability shifts from a mark of incapability to a source of value. The tank community's acceptance of

[15] At this point, my use of 'progress' or 'progressive' does take on the double, political meaning. It develops the associations with diversity, equality, and so forth, even as my analysis problematizes these characteristics. Of course, even as progress can be used in this political sense, its meaning remains unstable: Progress is always a society's ill-defined 'better.' But this does not mean that critics cannot determine when things that seem better continue to propose problematic ideas.

Nemo's fin offers an alternate conception of disability, despite the way that prejudice underscores this seemingly positive view. This shift is an extension of the social model of disability. One cannot simply change ingrained prejudices against those with disabilities in our world, but, in a narrative, this formula of conflict and its necessary resolution allows for a direct re-enabling of formally dis-abled characters. The audience must accept this transformation as the plot swiftly moves on, which forces the audience to go along with what seems like a progressive narrative but is really a story that connotes disability as something in need of a cure.

Marlin also overcomes his disability, and the narrative represents this through a teaching moment, wherein he becomes aware of the misunderstandings he has made about Nemo's disability. Marlin's doubt of Nemo arises partially due to his own disability, but this also causes Marlin to double as a figure whom adults can identify with. He embodies the same social biases against disability that our society grapples with. After Nemo is kidnapped, Marlin is joined by Dory, an adult fish whose short-term memory loss functions as a cognitive disability. At one point, these two are swallowed by a whale. Dory insists that she can speak whale, but Marlin shouts at her in disbelief, "You're insane! You can't speak whale" (*Finding Nemo* 01:10:02-01:10:04). The harsh tone of his condemnation reflects his earlier remarks to Nemo about whether or not he can swim well. Marlin does not think that Dory can understand what the whale wants them to do, and shouts, "You think you can do these things, but you can't, Nemo!" (*Finding Nemo* 01:12:42-01:12:45). The close-up of the camera reveals the slight widening of Marlin's eyes after he shouts this, and this highlights Marlin's mistake. He is not speaking to Nemo—he is shouting at Dory. But he has mixed those two up, conflating the two characters because of how he continuously dis-ables both of them with his accusations of incapability. He does what has been normalized in our society: homogenizing disability. The two characters are

different and so are their impairments. Marlin expresses the prejudice that pervades our society, but this didactic moment signifies that his character also has the potential to change. When he realizes that he has made an error in his perception of Nemo's disability, Marlin makes the audience newly conscious of their own misunderstandings about disability. The film provides the possibility to rectify the adult audience's mistakes by instilling more tolerant views of disability in the children watching the film. This is a chance to transform social constructions of disability. However, although this moment is imbued with teaching potential, it is not wholly positive. This initial shift, what will allow Marlin to move past his disability, still reinforces Nemo's dis-ability.

The last scene of the film shows the extent of Marlin's transition. He has reunited with Nemo, and they now reside back on the reef. Marlin, too, has received a narrative prosthetic and has overcome his disability. The structure of the scene parallels Nemo's first day of school, letting the viewers see what a typical morning now looks like for the two. Marlin is the one who is eager to leave their home, bring Nemo to school, and interact with his community (*Finding Nemo* 01:30:53). He no longer exhibits the same fear and hyper-vigilance when leaving their house. Additionally, Marlin can now socially engage with his peers, making the other parents laugh, which was something that he failed to do at the beginning of the film (*Finding Nemo* 01:31:05-01:31:13). The narrative no longer suggests any symptoms of his disability, meaning that, even if Marlin still lives with PTSD, it no longer dis-ables him. This scene mirrors the beginning of the film, but the audience can easily see that the film has shifted its emphasis from Nemo to Marlin. Marlin's character has changed the most. Viewers can watch Nemo swimming just as well as he has been all along, but Marlin no longer dis-ables him by obsessing over his fin. The overcoming of Marlin's disability therefore extends to Nemo's as well. Attuned

narrative literacy would allow the audience to recall the earlier plot point from the beginning and juxtapose this one with it, making Marlin's transformation obvious. This relates to the social model of disability and shows the audience what kinds of attitudes can re-enable people with impairments, even though offering such a straightforward cure remains troubling. The film's visual medium reinforces the medical model of disability because of how the inescapable visual representation of Nemo's shortened fin continues to be at odds with how well he swims. This leaves the audience with a sense of cognitive dissonance when they cannot help but remember Nemo's impairment. His narrative prosthetic cannot be wholly effective because it is just that—narrative. Similarly, portraying Marlin as suddenly cured of his PTSD inaccurately reflects the real experiences of many veterans and other citizens who have this disability. Post-traumatic stress disorder *is* a real and valid disability. It is the most common cause for veterans' reception of disability benefits after combat (Jackson et. al. 610). The sudden, mystical cure of Marlin's disability promotes the idea that PTSD is easily 'fixed,' which socially invalidates the experiences of real people with PTSD. Regardless, the shifts in these characters are sincerely meant to represent potential, but they also unwittingly extend ableist bias.

The dual audience of children's films, parents and children, adds complexity to the ways in which Marlin's and Nemo's disabilities become defined through their relationship. When parents witness this, they must confront the implications for how they socialize their children, even if their child is not disabled. Despite the new sensitivity that this film attempts to cultivate through its narrative, it remains subject to the limitations of the medium. Narrating disability as a trial to overcome, as much as it contributes to the goal of moving past prejudiced social constructions of disability, inevitably extends the harmful misunderstanding that disability is something shameful that *must* be overcome. The film cannot remove one message from the

other. Like all texts, *Finding Nemo* relies on the audience's literacy, but children seeing this film may end up internalizing very conflicted messages about disability without consciously realizing that they still reflect ableist views. These children will grow up to reproduce these contradictions in the world, a problem that reoccurs with the portrayal of cognitive difference in *Finding Dory*.

Chapter Three

Difference, Disability, and Dory: The (De)Valuing of Cognitive Variation

As I discussed in the introduction to this project, there is no comprehensive definition of 'disability,' but the way that disability signifies an abnormality remains a major component of contemporary discourse. Our society equates disability with difference. To an extent, the identification of this difference reflects the subjectivity of disability, but it also unifies distinct individuals with disabilities in a comparison of 'different than' a majority. In this chapter, I focus on *Finding Dory* as a case study for understanding how, or even if, our society attempts to resolve the stigma included in this discussion of difference. *Finding Dory*, the sequel to *Finding Nemo*, focuses on an adult fish named Dory. She tries to overcome her short-term memory loss as she searches for her parents, Jenny and Charlie, whom she was separated from as a child. The father-son duo, Marlin and Nemo, accompany Dory but also become separated from her. A seven-legged octopus named Hank joins Dory, and they traverse the Marine Life Institute in Morro Bay, California to find her parents. By the end of the film, Dory reunites with her parents, Marlin, and Nemo, but the film characterizes her short-term memory loss as the main obstacle that she must triumph over in order to achieve this. This narrative trajectory challenges how the audience might associate what makes Dory different, her disability, with a stigma, although this attempt to subvert prejudice is not always effective.

Difference is not a neutral identifier. We construct difference through comparison, which creates relationships of opposition. Each contrasted idea within a binary becomes charged as either positive or negative. One thing becomes right and the other becomes wrong. Identifying disability as what makes someone different from a non-disabled majority reflects this discursive system. Ronald Berger writes, "All too many nondisabled people view people with disabilities as

a 'fearsome possibility'…In this way, 'the disabled person becomes the Other—a living symbol of failure, frailty…a counterpoint to normality; a figure whose very humanity is questioned'" (8). Disability cannot be just a neutral difference. By imagining people with disabilities as this Other, we construct their identities as this threatening difference. We reduce them to an abhorrent idea that threatens a normal existence. One might object and say that this difference is just a matter of acknowledging diversity and is not necessarily malignant, but Lennard J. Davis problematizes this explanation, claiming that diversity advocates that "'We are all different—therefore we are all the same.' But if difference is equated with sameness, then how can being different mean anything? That contradiction is usually resolved by finding one Other to repress—an Other whose existence is barely acknowledged. That Other is disability" ("Diversity" 63). In other words, messages of diversity assert that it is acceptable or normal to be different in some ways, but disability falls outside of that realm of normality. Diversity reassures us that it is okay to be different in some ways as long as we are not this ultimate Other. In our society, we are taught to think of 'the disabled' as abnormal—something that, if we are lucky, we are not.

We can theorize disability, then, as what our society teaches us to identify as not normal. In my first chapter, I demonstrate that children's literature is a primary method in how we are taught this, and *Finding Dory* uses this relationship when representing Dory's disability. Regardless, similarly to disability, normal is not a stable category either. Tanya Titchkoksy writes about the non-static nature of normality, identifying it as "*a referential system of sense making* and not a natural or pregiven condition of existence" (131, emphasis in orig.). Concepts of normality are socially constructed through comparative relationships between things or peoples. People—identities—do not have predetermined values or meanings, so the definition of normal or abnormal is tied to this hierarchy. The false universalism of normality allows a

privileged social group, in this case, non-disabled people, to remain socially empowered at the expense of their so-called abnormal counterparts. Titchkoksy elaborates on this discursive identification:

> To 'become normal,' then, is to *manage the appearance of any departure* from the expected as an unwanted difference…Thus, 'abnormal' is not an objective departure from the norm; it is what is produced when a perceived difference is taken as an affront to ordinary group expectations. The social process of perceiving 'undesired differences' is what Goffman studied as stigma (132, emphasis in orig.).

This means that social collectives, communities, expect their members to aspire to a norm. Constructing difference as abnormal, a word that connotes wrongness or immorality, makes social inequality permissible, or even desirable, when it creates stigmas that reinstate the power of those who assert themselves as normal. This privileges one identity over others. This hierarchy aligns disability with abnormality, which produces ableist prejudice. Recent movements in disability studies and media representations of disability seek to overturn these ingrained prejudices by rejecting that disability lies as the polar opposite of normality and instead imagining it as "a positive aspect of [one's] identity that provides [people] with a unique and at times contentious way of being in and viewing the world" (Berger 14). We do not have to think of disability as abnormal—we should not. There is room for disability in the idea of diversity, of finding difference within normality. *Finding Dory* is one example of a story that attempts to resituate the idea of normality in relation to disability. Even though the film portrays disabled characters such as Dory as different, ultimately, it tries not to characterize this difference as merely bad or wrong.

When media and discourse fabricate standards of normality, ableist biases become more widespread and more deeply ingrained in our culture. In order to overturn such prejudice, we must first reveal their prevalence within our society. Paul K. Longmore addresses this as the central role of disability studies when he argues that "The scholarly task is…to raise awareness the unconscious attitudes and values embedded in media images. The political task is to liberate disabled people from the paternalistic prejudice expressed in those images and to forge a new social identity. The two are inseparable" (146). The desire for a new critical awareness can turn the simple act of watching a children's film political when it exposes the problems in how our society teaches us to think about disability. The representation of Dory's disability contains the legacy of this "paternalistic prejudice." Even when making strides towards progress, media like *Finding Dory* still have a lot of work to do in order to actually overturn these previous constructions of disability.

Finding Dory first establishes the reality of disability discourse in contemporary America by highlighting the common perception of disability-as-abnormality. The film exemplifies this through its portrayal of what marks Dory as different: her short-term memory loss. The representation of Dory's disability implicates the viewer, for the narrative encourages this stigmatized identification. The film then attempts to resituate the idea of difference by representing Dory's journey to accept her disability. This shifts the characterization of her disability from an abnormality that socially isolates her into a positive difference that functions as a valuable problem-solving tool. Instead of completely supplanting this biased perception of disability, though, the film cannot escape ableist prejudice. The film's infantilized portrayal of Dory reinstates stereotypes of people with disabilities and perpetuates the audience's misunderstandings of disability. I argue that the inconsistent characterization of Dory's disability

demonstrates that, although our society attempts to instill tolerance in our children, we actually reproduce prejudice under this guise of progress.

The film originally represents Dory's short-term memory loss as an identity that she must feel ashamed of. At the beginning of the film, Dory stutters through the introduction, "Hi, I'm Dory. I suffer from short-term memory loss." (*Finding Dory* 00:00:49-00:00:56). The screen remains black as Dory tells the audience her name, and her image only fills the screen when she professes her disability (see fig. 3). Compositionally, Dory floats in what seems like the exact center of the screen. Dory stands against the framing of this scene since the vivid blue and yellow of her body contrasts with the dull, tan sand and the muted green of the seaweed behind

Fig. 3. Opening image; *Finding Dory* 00:00:52; Directed by Andrew Stanton and Angus MacLane, Disney/Pixar, 2016.

her. This emphasis forces the viewer to focus on the luminous purple of her eyes, which take up almost half of her body. The bright color and size of her eyes convey warmth and innocence while highlighting Dory as the focal point, not just of this scene, but of the whole film. The introduction Dory gives, her name followed by the admission about her short-term memory loss, foregrounds her disability as the essential characteristic of her identity. This teaches the viewers to equate her entire identity with her disability, which reflects David T. Mitchell's and Sharon L. Snyder's claim that "to introduce one's disability into discourse (social or academic) is to suddenly have that single aspect subsume all others" (xi). This scene expresses that Dory *is* her disability. While Dory's disability is important since it shapes the narrative arc of the film and

her entire worldview, it is not all that she is. Implying otherwise reduces people with disabilities to only one facet of their identity, one that our society teaches us to imagine as an aberration.

The film also constructs disability as a negative identity, a symptom of the Other, in Dory's description of her disability. Dory does not simply *have* short-term memory loss; she "*suffer[s]*" from it (emphasis mine). This characterizes her disability as an affliction, which implies that Dory's disability does not simply make her different—her difference plagues her. Because the film implies that this difference is her whole identity, this dialogue suggests that, on a fundamental level, Dory suffers from being herself. This scene is explicitly didactic: Dory's parents instruct her on how to introduce herself to others, similarly to how the scene teaches viewers how to identify her and her disability. After Dory recites this, her parents clap and congratulate her. Her father praises Dory, saying, "That's exactly what you say," reinforcing the underlying prejudice that disability is something that causes suffering (*Finding Dory* 00:00:57-00:00:58). The didacticism of the characters' interaction creates an unsettling parallel for parents who show this film to their children, perhaps in the hopes of teaching them tolerance. The way that Dory's parents affirm this assertion of Dory's disability resembles how Louis' father teaches his son to think about his disability as a defect in *The Trumpet of the Swan*. This conversation does not, therefore, create the most progressive representation of disability, but it does set up the main conceptual conflict of the plot. Dory, other characters, and the audience must learn to reconceptualize Dory's short-term memory loss. The film reappropriates the idea of difference, giving it new value by asserting that we must learn to accept and appreciate what makes Dory different instead of pitying or condemning her for it.

Dory repeatedly faces this kind of stigma about her disability from other characters, but the film models this ableism most overtly when she criticizes herself. The opening scene depicts

how Dory's parents teach her to internalize prejudice, and this trend continues throughout the story. The first scene carries on as she and her parents play a game of hide and seek until Dory wanders off towards a dangerous current in the water, the undertow. Her father tells her to avoid it, chanting, "We see the undertow, and we say…" (*Finding Dory* 00:01:50-00:01:52). He wants Dory to complete the sentence with "heck no," but she says "let's go" instead (*Finding Dory* 00:01:54). Dory mixes up the rhyme a second time, prompting her to question, "Did I forget again?" when she sees her parents exchanging worried and disappointed glances (*Finding Dory* 00:02:15). This negative reaction to her short-term memory loss leads Dory, as well as the audience, to associate her disability with something upsetting or wrong. The film flashes forward soon after this, and an adult Dory worriedly and unironically repeats the same question, "Did I forget again?," when she goes on a fieldtrip with Nemo's class and the kids laugh at her when she does, in fact, forget her place in a conversation (*Finding Dory* 00:10:09). Dory asks this question throughout the film, demonstrating that her disability is a source of anxiety and shame for her. This has troubling consequences for her identity. After she forgets something again, Dory mutters to herself, "Don't be such a Dory, Dory" (*Finding Dory* 00:13:15). This line is a small aside that Dory says softly under her breath. The characters in the film do not notice it, but the audience cannot help but hear how it reveals how pervasive and severe the negative characterization of Dory's disability is. It permeates all of her experiences to the extent that her entire identity, being Dory, is about being disabled, being different, being *wrong*. She does not want to be "a Dory," because she has learned that being Dory means being someone who is considered less than. At this point in the film, the audience has learned the same thing. The film's subsequent narrative tries to supplant this perception of disability, showing that it is valuable to be "a Dory."

Before Dory can triumph over this stigma, other characters such as Marlin reinforce it.[16] When Marlin and Nemo join Dory on her quest to find her parents at the Jewel of Morro Bay in California, Nemo becomes injured after the trio is chased by a predator fish (*Finding Dory* 00:19:51). Dory frets over Nemo, forgets what happens, and then frets all over again. Marlin worries over his son and snaps at Dory when she does this. He exasperatedly tells her, "Go wait over there and forget. It's what you do best" (*Finding Dory* 00:20:15-00:20:19). This statement again implicates Dory's disability as something that devalues her. Forgetting is a kind of negation. It is an experience of erasure—of loss. If this loss is what Dory does best, then the conclusion is that Dory has no value. This condemnation reinforces that what makes Dory different, her disability, causes her to be a burden. Both Marlin and Dory eventually learn that this is not the case, proving to the audience that Dory's unique mindset, something caused by her disability, is actually a useful trait.

Marlin is actually the first to identify Dory's difference as valuable, but he must first recognize how he misrepresents Dory's disability before this can happen. When Nemo reminds Marlin about what he said to Dory, Marlin tries to shift responsibility for making an ableist remark. He explains, "Look, if I said that—and I'm not positive that I did—it's actually a compliment because I asked her to wait, and I said it's what you do best…," but he then admits that it was an inappropriate, hurtful comment to make (*Finding Dory* 00:25:17-00:25:26). Almost immediately after he tries to characterize the insult as a compliment, Marlin exclaims, "Oh, it's my fault! It's all my fault…" (*Finding Dory* 00:25:28-00:25:30). Even though Marlin acknowledges that it was his accusatory dismissal of Dory that caused her to run off and get

[16] Of course, this idea of "triumph" over disability, of overcoming disability by finding value in it, is a narrative arc similar to the one I identified in my previous chapter on *Finding Nemo*. When Marlin does see Dory's disability as useful, it does exemplify what Michael Bérubé calls "the rendering of disability as exceptionality," which, as I describe in last chapter, has its own problems since it implies the need for a cure (8).

taken into the Institute, Marlin does not yet admit that he was wrong. In this moment, the audience can see the consequences of prejudice, how hurtful it can be to those with disabilities, but the audience, as well as Marlin, might still see his remark as factually correct. Up to this point, the film has shown Dory repeatedly forgetting important information. A general audience might see this as evidence that Dory really is best at forgetting. The film depicts Marlin's crisis of conscience, but it does not clearly expose the conceptual problems with ableism. Marlin feels guilty, but he does not admit he was wrong. The film's tacit permission of prejudice continues even when Marlin learns to admire how Dory, because of the outlook on life induced by her short-term memory loss, excels at problem-solving.

This valuing occurs when Marlin and Nemo temporarily mimic what makes Dory different. The two get stuck in a tank while they are at the Marine Life Institute. Marlin confesses that he is worried about Dory, but he also acknowledges, "Well, she would definitely have an idea of what to do if she were here…" (*Finding Dory* 00:46:42-00:46:45). He realizes that Dory's short-term memory loss does not make her incapable; in fact, Marlin recognizes that Dory, because of her disability, is much better suited to this spontaneous problem-solving than he is. Both Nemo and Marlin question, "What would Dory do?" (*Finding Dory* 00:46:55-00:46: 57). This becomes a mantra for the two, and they use it to escape. This demonstrates that Dory's difference does not need to be understood as wrong or bad when Marlin and Nemo learn to appreciate it.[17] She has skills that Marlin and Nemo do not, and she, even just as inspiration, can help the two succeed. Dory's disability becomes valuable, but this scene is not a wholly positive celebration of Dory and what makes her different. When Marlin wonders aloud about how Dory

[17] The film signifies the importance of this narrative reconceptualization of Dory's disability by portraying a similar dynamic between Dory and Hank as what we see here with Marlin and Nemo. Hank implies that Dory is crazy because of her disability (*Finding Dory* 00:23:28-00:23:32). He later also learns to see Dory as capable because of her disability, reinforcing Marlin's revelation. Due to space constraints, I do not include an extended analysis here.

is so adept at getting through tough situations, Nemo replies "I don't think she knows, Dad. She just *does*," and Marlin agrees (*Finding Dory* 00:46:49-00:46:51, emphasis mine). While this might seem like an innocent statement, it effectively reinforces prejudiced assumptions about cognitive disabilities. Yes, these characters can now see the value in Dory's different mindset, but her skillfulness is reduced to considering her an idiot savant.[18] They think that Dory's intellect has nothing to do with her success—it is almost as if her skill is a fluke. After all, she does not know. She does not think. "She just does." This rationale reflects the ableist expectation that people with cognitive disabilities are unintelligent or incapable of thought. Even in this moment, what seems like a triumph over the devaluing of people with disabilities, the film continues to validate prejudice.

After characters initially question Dory's capability, the film finally begins to show the audience that these accusations are misguided. The scene where Dory and Hank make their way through the Institute inside of a baby carriage exemplifies this shift in how the film portrays disabled characters (*Finding Dory* 00:38:46-00:39:35). Although Hank reminds Dory that they need to "follow the signs to the Open Ocean Exhibit" to find her parents, the audience sees Dory reading the signs and navigating the Institute (*Finding Dory* 00:38:55-00:38:57). Hank uses his tentacles to push the cart and change direction when Dory tells him to. This dynamic reverses the viewers' expectations of the partnership; because of Dory's cognitive disability, as well as the discriminatory remarks already levied against her within the film, the audience might expect that Dory would require assistance in the intellectual work needed to find her parents. Similarly, because Hank is missing a limb, viewers might dismiss the possibility that he could take care of

[18] In her essay "From Freaks to Savants: Disability and Hegemony from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1939) to *Sling Blade* (1997)," Fiona Whittington-Walsh explores film's archetypes for depicting disabled characters, including the idiot savants who "have remarkable 'talents,' which reinforce their 'difference' against the 'normalness' of other characters" (699). For a savant like Dory, disabled difference may be valued but only in ways that reinstate oppressive social norms. This does not overturn prejudice—it justifies it.

the physical side of this endeavor. This scene disproves these ableist assumptions. Dory is the one who does the brainwork, while Hank is responsible for the legwork. The partnership demonstrates the capabilities of each character, that their disabilities do not make them helpless. Lennard J. Davis links this kind of ableism to developments of fields like statistics and eugenics, writing that attitudes about disability are "supplemented by the notion of progress, human perfectibility, and the elimination of deviance, to create a dominating, hegemonic vision of what the human body should be" (*Enforcing Normalcy* 35). Deviances, in other words, should be eradicated, by rehabilitation or by other means. Our society's rejection of the disabled Other is rooted in this reasoning, but the dynamic between Dory and Hank subverts the presumption that differently-abled people are "deviant" or inferior. This reversal of expectations is only solidified when the duo actually make it to the Open Ocean Exhibit. Earlier in the film, Dory describes echolocation as "the world's strongest pair of glasses," and the audience later hears Dory reading a sign aloud with the very same words on it, leading her to exclaim, "We found it!" when she realizes that she has remembered how to finding her previous home (*Finding Dory* 00:45:43-00:45:48). Dory's short-term memory loss does not need to dis-able her; she is perfectly capable of accomplishing memory and intellectually oriented tasks, even with her memory loss. She has spent her life being socially dis-abled by her family, her friends, her community—and, of course, the audience. Neither Dory nor Hank needed assistance in what had allegedly been dis-abled for each of them. These scenes show the audience that these characters are perfectly capable adults, just like the majority of real-life people with disabilities. This positive representation reinforces the shifts in characters' attitudes without the same ideological conflicts.

Eventually, Dory herself learns that what makes her different does not make her lesser. When Dory leaves the Institute, feeling disheartened and thinking that she has missed her chance

to find her parents, she actually reunites with them. The joyful reunion does not last long before Dory breaks down in a tearful apology: "I'm sorry! …I know I've got a problem. I know, and I'm so sorry, and all this time I've wanted to fix it—and I can't, and I try—I try, but my thoughts—they leave my head, and ideas change, and I've forgotten you—and I'm so sorry! (*Finding Dory* 01:08:58-1:09:14). Dory gasps this out between sobs, releasing both her frustration with not being able to remember and also her guilt for their separation, which she blames on her disability. In this cathartic moment, Dory expresses the understanding of her disability that she has internalized, that it is a "problem" which she has been shamed into apologizing for and into trying to "fix." Her parents are quick to comfort her, for they clearly never intended to instill such self loathing towards her disability. This demonstrates that the stigma associated with disability is insidious, something that plagues everyday interactions and discourse, even—or especially—when we do not intend for this to happen. Jenny praises Dory, "You found us, and you know why you found us? Because you remembered. You remembered in your own amazing Dory way" (*Finding Dory* 01:10:10-01:10:20). Dory's way of remembering is not the normal way, but Jenny reassures her that it has still worked. She found Jenny and Charlie, and she did it because she was special. Her disability might prevent Dory from being normal, but, according to characters in the film, it makes her special and "amazing." Although there are problems with representing disability as exceptionality, this makes Dory and the audience realize that she has accomplished some pretty incredible feats because of her short-term memory loss—not in spite of it.

Dory demonstrates this newfound acceptance of her disability and the usefulness of the mindset it provides her with when she rescues herself, Hank, and all of the other fish on-board of a truck heading to Cleveland. She frees everyone on the truck, and when viewers watch the fish

flying through the air to the sound of Louis Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World," one cannot help but realize that no other fish could pull this off (*Finding Dory* 01:22:05-1:23:08). It is uniquely Dory. She is the only character in the entire franchise who thinks out of the box so well that she can realize how this situation is not hopeless. Dory uses the same skills that she and Hank practiced when steering the baby carriage to drive the truck back towards the ocean. The singer in the background music croons the lyric "…they're really saying I love you" when Dory tumbles out of the truck and into the center of the frame (see fig. 4). The message is potent: If the

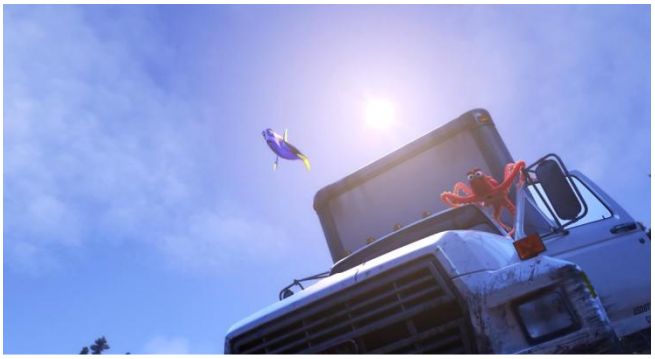

Fig. 4. "They're really saying I love you"; *Finding Dory* 01:22:42; Directed by Andrew Stanton and Angus MacLane. Disney/Pixar. 2016.

world is wonderful, it is because of the beauty of characters and people like Dory. This scene implores the audience to love Dory because she is different, not hate her for it. The film also suggests that this mindset should be extended to real-life people with disabilities as well. At the very end of the film, Dory has a conversation with Marlin. During it, Dory proudly admits, "Yeah, I did it" (*Finding Dory* 01:26:06-01:26:08). She smiles contentedly as Marlin gazes at her admiringly. Dory's appreciation for herself, disability and all, completes the arc of acceptance, of rendering disability as valuable. Mitchell and Snyder theorize that the goal of narrative prosthesis, as discussed in the previous chapter, "is to return one to an acceptable degree of difference" (7). The film does this when Dory's success makes her difference acceptable instead of shameful, but this characterization of Dory's disability also challenges what Mitchell and

Snyder see as the typical form of narrative prosthesis. They claim that, "While an actual prosthesis is always somewhat discomforting, a textual prosthesis alienates discomfort by removing the unsightly from view" of the audience (Mitchell and Snyder 8). *Finding Dory* does the opposite. The prosthetic is the narrative reconceptualization of Dory's disability, which highlights its potential instead of obscuring it. The prosthetic here is the characterization of Dory's short-term memory loss as valuable. Dory is not dis-abled; she is differently-abled, and the film tries to avoid any overt associations of this difference as negative, even if this attempt fails. The characters appreciate disability as a factor of diversity, showing the viewers that they can, and should, as well.

Although different characters' growth seems to suggest a progressive, triumphant message about advocating for the importance of difference as useful manifestations of human diversity, moments within the narrative subvert this idea by promoting the image of Dory as a child. This infantilization occurs partly due to the frequent use of flashback: How can the audience see Dory as an adult when we are so often reminded of her as a child? The opening scene demonstrates a similar phenomenon. Dory's introduction, "Hi, I'm Dory. I suffer from short-term memory loss," conflates her identity, not just with disability, but with childhood naivety as well. (*Finding Dory* 00:00:49-00:00:56). The film achieves this with the emphasis on her large, bright eyes and her high-pitched voice, two qualities that suggest youthful innocence. To an extent, this is a useful characterization. Aligning Dory with the familiar identity of child helps further subvert the otherwise alienating portrayal of her as a cartoon fish. A child watching can better identify with a childlike Dory. Stuart Hall distinguishes between the commonsense use of identification to mean "a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal" and the discursive definition to mean "a construction,

a process never completed…a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination" ("Who Needs Identity?" 16-17). Both senses of identification apply here. Child viewers can relate to Dory if they see her as a child, and this perceived commonality is a point of suture that unifies the two sides of this representational relationship, even as it problematizes Dory's identity. This scene encourages the audience to think of Dory-as-disabled and Dory-as-child, which leaves the audience to conclude that having a disability makes someone essentially childlike. Dory's introduction leads the audience to think of Dory as a child who needs to be taken care of and taught. The rhetorical implications of the title, *Finding Dory*, reinforce this suggestion. Even though the plot centers around Dory finding her parents, the title makes it clear that Dory must find herself. But to do this, she must first find her parents. This suggests that Dory is dependent on her parents. By age, Dory is an adult, but the film characterizes her as a child. This proposes that people with disabilities are incapable of living as functional members of society, that they require a caretaker, that they are essentially children—less than adults, or simply less than.

Dory's living arrangement at the beginning of the film supports this infantilized characterization of Dory. This story occurs a year after the first film in the franchise, and, in the time between films, Dory ends up living with Marlin and Nemo. The audience sees Dory wake up in the middle of the night, become disoriented when she does not remember where she is, and then wake Marlin up as though she is a scared child with a nightmare (*Finding Dory* 00:07:08-00:07:22). Disgruntled at being awoken, Marlin sends Dory back to bed twice before just giving in and waking up. This scene characterizes Dory as an unruly child. Dory's memory loss upon waking implies that she cannot live alone and needs the help of a caretaker, so Dory lives as Marlin's dependent. The film implies that Dory's memory loss dis-ables her because it renders her a child, and *that* is what makes her incapable. The events of the following morning extend

the infantilization of Dory, demonstrating how *in*capable she is because of her childlike nature. Dory attends the same class as Nemo, who is only in his second year of schooling. The class is going on a fieldtrip, and Marlin explains to Dory, "It would be best if today you weren't exactly with the class" (*Finding Dory* 00:08:38-00:08:43). The teacher, Mr. Ray, does not want Dory to get in the way because she tends to wander. This dialogue suggests that Dory frequently attends the class as a student and that she poses a bigger problem than any of the actual kids. The fact that Dory is a regular student in what is the equivalent of a first or second-grade class solidifies the idea that the audience cannot consider Dory an adult. This logic also links the infantilization of Dory to her disability. Dory's innocent misunderstanding of Marlin's words, thinking that Marlin and Mr. Ray are letting her be a class helper instead of a student, justifies infantilizing Dory; she cannot possibly interact with adults socially, so she does not have the same capability of 'normal' adults.

Despite how she proves that she is capable throughout the film, Dory cannot escape the infantilized portrayal. After Dory rescues herself and the other fish, the screen turns black (*Finding Dory* 01:23:10). The audience hears Dory counting, and then she appears on screen (*Finding Dory* 01:23:11-01:23:42). Dory is playing hide and seek, which parallels the opening scene when Dory's parents model the game for her. This moment is conflicted: It shows both Dory's character growth and how she remains thought of as a child. Like in the first game of hide and seek, Dory forgets what is happening halfway through it, but she can now figure out from context what is going on and completes the game. This shows that she is more capable than she was when she was originally a child, but she continues to play the game as the seeker while her parental figures, Jenny, Charlie, and Marlin, anxiously monitor how she does. This places Dory in the role of the child once more and addresses the ambiguity of her living arrangement.

Marlin invites her back to the anemone, where Dory lived with him and Nemo at the beginning of the film, suggesting that she continues to live with him (*Finding Dory* 01:24:08-01:24:13). Just before this, Jenny and Charlie swam off, leaving Dory with Marlin and the class with just Charlie calling, "Okay, kelpcake, have fun" (*Finding Dory* 01:24:02-01:24:04). This remark sounds like a parent sending their child off to school before heading back home or to work. It raises the question of where Dory's parents live and if they live with her. This goes unanswered, which leaves open the possibility that Dory may continue to live as a dependent upon other adults, either her parents or Marlin. Even though the arc of the story has forced the audience to recognize Dory as a capable person, the film still presents Dory as a child, and the tension between these two representations of Dory remains unresolved. Having the ending mirror the beginning of the film helps the audience of children accept the morals of the film, though, even as it seems to contradict them. According to John Stephens, "the desire for *closure*, both in the specific sense of an achieved satisfying ending and in the more general sense of a final order and coherent significance, is characteristically a desire for fixed meanings, and is apparent in the socializing, didactic purposes of much children's literature" (41, emphasis in orig.). The apparent need to ensure the successful didacticism of this story actually undercuts the lesson that it is supposed to reinforce; however, ending the film with a similar scene to how it began, provides the necessary closure to the complex identity politics that was reproduced in the narrative. It is only with this closure that the children in the audience can begin to parse the social messages underling the story, but the film's infantilization of Dory still reduces the impact of learning to appreciate and value Dory's disability. In the film, Dory can never fully be an adult. She will always be childlike, always lesser. This lasting prejudice undermines the film's message of tolerating difference, making it seem insincere at best.

Nowadays, children grow up learning about human diversity. “Everyone is different,” parents might say, “and that is what makes someone special.” *Finding Dory,* as well as other media, tries to instill this moral, but the story ultimately undermines this inclusive message. And, as Davis argued, the celebration of diversity tends to exclude disability altogether, leaving it as the last Other to recuperate. The progress hoped for in espousing this message of tolerance, or of finding inclusivity within diversity, requires that we overcome the stigma attached to disability. Instead of promoting equality with this message of social tolerance, this film simply allows its viewers to continue thinking discriminately while feeling positively about that, reassured that they are pushing society forward by showing their children what seems like a more enlightened mindset. Wayne Booth argues that “readers who engage in a story, readers who enter the patterns of hopes, fears, and expectations that every story asks for, will always take on the ‘characters’ that are superior on the [text’s] fixed norms, to the relatively complex, erratic, and paradoxical characters that they cannot help being in their daily lives” (*The Company We Keep* 255). This is why we find films like *Finding Dory* so seductive in their messages: We see the straightforward success of characters and hope that we, too, can be better. We hope that our society can have that progress, and we accept these narratives without realizing their implications. The film’s promise of progress is founded on a false premise. *Finding Dory*, as well as its prequel, are not progressive—not wholly. Our society will not make real progress on how to treat people with disabilities until we ensure that our stories do not continue to teach our children prejudice.

Conclusion

Throughout my project, I have shown that representations of disability in children's literature are actually *mis*representations. The implicit bias in these portrayals contributes to society's dis-abling of different people. In my first chapter, I found that historical representations of disability moralize it in ways that mirror the social norms of the time periods in which those stories were written. These constructions of disability justify how real people are treated with prejudice. My analysis of *Finding Nemo* exposed how our society envisions disability—or, how it obscures it. In this chapter, I also proposed that narratives that seem to promote progress actually reestablish ableist biases, an argument that I expanded on in my final chapter. I critiqued how *Finding Dory* attempts to portray disability as capability, but analyzed how this failed since the film also maintains the assumption that people with disabilities are essentially children. Through these arguments, I hope that I have established the need to more closely examine what we, as a society, teach children about disability.

Oftentimes, scholars dismiss children's fiction as low literature, but my project demonstrates the potential this genre has for academic inquiry. My research also conveys the possibilities created when scholars apply other lenses (cultural studies, film studies, educational psychology, and, obviously, disability studies) to this field. Additionally, my research demonstrates that how we tell narratives has consequences for how we conceptualize ideas from these fields. Most importantly, my thesis has revealed that the fundamental structures that organize discourse on disability contain ableist prejudice and preclude progress altogether. In the future, I, and other scholars, can work to explain how media can reject old paradigms for disability and can open up new possibilities for imagining sincere progress.

I wanted my project to inquire into how children's literature and film construct identities of disabled subjects within our society. In doing so, I focused on the elements of each primary text that I thought could sustain a prolonged analysis of this question, which occurred at the expense of addressing other interesting parts of these texts. For example, my chapter on *Finding Nemo* concentrates on the relationship between Nemo and Marlin and excludes an analysis of Dory's character in that film, although she is central to my next chapter. Similarly, my chapter on *Finding Dory* originally included an extended analysis of Hank's relationship with Dory and as a character who has his own individual disability. For the sake of space, this discussion was condensed to how it related to my analysis of the changing narrativization of Dory's short-term memory loss. If I had more time and space, I would include a more thorough investigation of how Hank's relationship to his physical disability picks up on trends established in *Finding Nemo* about visibility and how this relates to the politics of 'different' identities.

Furthermore, I selected two texts in my first chapter that span about a century of children's literature, from 1869 to 1970. Given that "Cinderella" and *The Trumpet of the Swan* are just two examples, they cannot represent the state of children's literature for this entire century. I do not claim that they do, but these examples are meant to establish a pattern that shows how children's literature does function in similar, moralizing ways across time, even if the messages that they espouse are slightly different. In choosing these texts, I miss other opportunities to write about disability in children's fiction. Additionally, when imagining this chapter, I originally intended to incorporate how the inception of what we know of as children's literature occurs around the same time of the expansion of industrial capitalism. Morals that begin to encourage difference seem to correlate with ideas about the specialization of labor for

the good of society. My project ultimately took a different direction, although this area continues to interest me and could yield a productive inquiry later on.

The function of children's literature as content selected for children limits the scope of my project. I regret that I did not have the room to take up a more intersectional approach for understanding disability. The absence of this kind of discussion is partially due to the nature of my two major analyses, on *Finding Nemo* and *Finding Dory*. It is difficult to address issues of race or class when dealing with anthropomorphized fish. I am interested in seeing how these facets of identity compounds the effects of social dis-abling. Acknowledging Dory's gender, for example, affects the implications of her infantilization. Fiona Whittington-Walsh explores this topic in her essay on video representations of disability. She looks at how disabled women are portrayed as sexualized objects, even as men who have disabilities are generally desexualized and characterized as innocent (Whittington-Walsh 702-703). This might impact my analysis of Dory. Of course, the curation of content that is considered appropriate for children might explain the difficulty in sustaining an inquiry into the desexualization of disabled women in the texts that I chose. Again, in future work, I propose that scholars, myself included, should take a more intersectional approach to understanding representations of disability.

Using animals to teach children moral lessons might even be a way to avoid addressing issues of race, gender, and sexuality. Even though the stories I looked at all concentrate on disability, none of them ever come out and say 'disability.' *The Trumpet of the Swan* comes closest with the discussion of Louis' 'defect.' As much as children are able to relate to and learn from the animals in children's literature and film, these stories cannot escape the fact that the characters are not human and, therefore, escape some of the consequences of human socialization. Peter Nodelman addresses the issue of using animals in children's literature when

he charges, “But imagine a narrative illiterate, confronted with news about a world quite unlike the one he or she actually experiences outside books” and concludes that “For such a young reader, even the most conventional stories would have to seem…strange and bewildering” (6). The problems of using animals to teach human, social values exacerbate this sense of estrangement. There are suggestions of these other aspects of identity, such as an invocation of class with Louis’ concern for making money and how it is his wealth that entices Serena into finally paying attention to him. However, even White acknowledges how senseless it is for swans to care about money when “Louis felt a great sense of relief,” after repaying his father’s debt because “No more would he have to carry a moneybag around his neck” and have it weigh him down when flying (White 201). Additionally, *Finding Nemo* may include the vaguest allusion to race when the other parents expect Marlin to be funny because he is a clown fish or with the characterization of the bloodthirsty sharks, but there are problems with equating species with race. These characterizations reflect a kind of biological essentializing that is more fitting in the scientific classification of species than it is when representing the social consequences of discourse on race. Regardless, these issues fall out of the discussion of disability in my analyses, which may partially be a result of the genre that I look at.

My project explored how children’s literature of implements social values through didactic lessons in the hopes of ensuring some sort of societal progress. As problematic as I have shown these strives towards progress to be in *Finding Nemo* and *Finding Dory*, it is important to identify how our society envisions ‘progress.’ Moves towards diversity and acceptance, in regards to how it relates to representations of disability as well as other identities, are not a fad. This is not something that ends here. The widespread popularity and success of these two films demonstrate that our society continues to reach for these values. If we want these values to

succeed—or even if we want to understand the implications of these values—we must make sure that we know what morals are actually being taught and that our media does not still reproduce old prejudices. As scholars and as citizens, we must keep examining what it is that we teach our children, about disability and about the larger world. Without this, we will never achieve the progress that we hope for.

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