

The curious case of
christopher's
"disability": critical
and psychological
perspe...



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The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time introduces fifteen-year-old Christopher Boone, whose counselor has suggested that he write a book. Christopher's book is about his quest to find out who murdered his neighbors' dog; however, while searching for clues about the dog Christopher learns new things about the world, his family, and himself. The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time is written in first person and with Christopher as the narrator. It is from this perspective that the reader is forced to see the inner works of Christopher's brain, and how he interprets the world. From this, the reader can begin to process how even, what could be considered the most obvious signs that Christopher is disabled, are really just logical thoughts, and adaptive language skills. This essay argues that through it's simple plot, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time manages to show the reader the ways in which a disability places social constraints on people who have disabilities. Through Christopher's seemingly easy quest to discover who killed his next door neighbors dog, he is able to demonstrate the social confines of disability and its factitious standards.

Sarah Ray argues that Christopher can't be described as disabled nor abled, because it is not explicitly said which raises the possibility " that disability is in the eye of the reader not the character himself" (Ray, 2). She also goes on to argue that the novel shows the reader some of the ways that disability is a social construct. Shannon Wooden, however, urges that Christopher has Autism and the novel suggest the readers task is to figure out where he lies on the Disability Spectrum. Sarah Ray and Shannon Wooden both seek to prove confirmations about Christopher's alleged " disability" throughout their journal articles.

Within the first five pages of the novel we learn from our narrator, " This is a murder mystery novel," (Haddon, 4) and that all that this story is meant to be. It is from this statement that the author is directly telling the reader what the novel is and what it will be about. Even with these direct confirmation about the novels plot Wooden still believe the novel is " more complicated" because Christopher's " quest plot carries the additional weight of Christopher's obvious, clearly demarcated, but unnamed, special needs."(Wooden 278, 279). Shannon R. Wooden is direct proof of the ways in which a disability places social constraints on people who have disabilities. Her article raises the question of what makes it obvious that Christopher has specials needs ? This question is constantly suggested through Christopher's memorable way of viewing the world. The novel challenges this question by logically explaining every unconventional tick that Christopher thinks of. For example, Christopher's special education teacher explained to him how unusual it is to write a murder mystery about a dog. To counter this thought Christopher made the sound reasoning that he likes dogs, he wants to write about something that really happened to him, and that he doesn't know any people who have been murdered. All these make sense and are logical so why is it seen as unusual. Christopher's idea of him writing a novel about a dog is discouraged because it runs the risk of drawing attention to his disability, which in accordance to Wooden, is a weight. This demonstrates the bounds that we, as humans, put on one another, especially on those seen as different or assumed to be disabled.

Additionally, besides the fact that Christopher has a special education teacher, there is no other reliable sign that Christopher has a disability.

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Never in the novel does it directly say that Christopher has disability, there are only suggestions and certain qualities in Christopher that would indicate that he is disabled. Sarah Ray proposes that “ By never explicitly diagnosing Christopher, author Mark Haddon suggests a disability studies perspective from the outset: the “ medical model” of disability is not central to Christopher’s own experience of the world.” (Ray 2) This further emphasizes that those who deem themselves as “ able” are also the same as those who deem others as “ disabled”. Even without confirmations of Christopher’s health, certain aspects that the reader picks up on, allow the reader to label him and place social constraints of their perceptions of his abilities.

Both Ray and Wooden surround the entirety of their articles around the concept of Christopher’s disability and how to prove if he has one or not. Disability was never introduced in the novel so how did it become a subject of discussion throughout researchers. Disability is in the eye of the reader, like how in society disability is in the eye of the beholder. Ray notes that disability is a social construct by exploring the idea of disability not being located in the individual, but instead “ located in the contingent relationship between the individual and social expectations behavior and productivity.”(Ray 2) *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* exemplifies this by making the novel from Christopher’s perspective. Never in the novel did Christopher describe himself as disabled although many readers label Christopher as disabled, and believe that the novel is about his disability because he may do things out of the norm, think things through using only logic, not liking to be touched, or because it takes him longer to comprehend certain thing.

Language is a huge theme in the novel and perhaps the strongest hint at Christopher's alleged disability. On page 7, Christopher, when in conversation with the policeman, answers all of the questions literally. Reading that the cop was left confused, Haddon allows the reader to see how people react to Christopher, but reverts the readers " he must be disabled" theory by putting the whole scene in Christopher's point of view. To the outside Christopher's language may appear as strange, but to Christopher it is logical. It is the readers assumption and forced constraint on Christopher that he must speak differently to others because he may have a disability. Christopher answered the police officers answer correctly and honestly, why should the cop be thrown off. Wooden introduces the idea that because of Christopher's distinct and logical language he hints to the reader that he is challenged. Wooden states, " While Christopher gives concrete facts and a detailed accounting of his thought processes , he also unwittingly reveals information about his behavioral challenges and the dysfunction of his family." (Wooden 280) But, in chapter 79 Christopher's father very specifically tells him things he's not allowed to do namely, go around asking people about the dog, and anything involving " this ridiculous bloody detective game" (Haddon 23), Christopher does exactly that. Christopher uses language as directly as he can, and he even picks up on the complications society puts on language yet chooses to ignore them simple because he enjoys simplistic language. It is in the chapter that Christopher acknowledges that he understand he father wants to leave the whole Dog incident alone, yet because he only told Christopher to do not do those three things he will listen and act accordingly. This correlates with Ray beliefs Christopher having " a more ethical mode of being in the nonhuman world".
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(Ray 5) Christopher says that all the other students at his school are stupid. “ He knows he shouldn’t call them stupid: it’s better to say they have learning disabilities.” Christopher is a faster learner in maths than his classmates, but just because he needs more time to understand math doesn’t mean they are disabled. Similarly, just because it may take Christopher more time to understand a joke this doesn’t mean he can be labeled disabled. With today’s “ disabled logic” everyone in the world would technically have learning disabilities because we all learn at different paces, we all are faster than someone, yet slower than another.

Humans all handle things differently than one another, because one does something differently than the majority doesn’t mean they should be labeled abnormal. The definition of normal is artificial, and has made up rules, just as disability does. Ray acknowledges that society is abnormal in some of its ideals so why when some choices to do different are they considered abnormal. She states “ *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*” destabilizes dominant notions of normalcy. It paradoxically shows us how normal Christopher is, and, through Christopher’s perspective, how silly society’s ideas of normalcy”. In chapter 29 Christopher explains why people confuse him. He explains how Siobhan told him that “ if you close your mouth and breathe out loudly through your nose it can mean that you are relaxed, or that you are bored, or that you are angry and it all depends on how much air comes out of your nose and how fast and what shape your mouth is in when you do it and how you are sitting and what you said just before and hundreds of other things which are too complicated to work out in a few seconds” (Haddon, 15). If we think about this logically, determining

someones mood from how much air comes out somebodys nose is quite confusing and actually very unnatural. However Wooden states that it is because he can pick up on the abnormal the “ very early, we discover something is “ wrong” with Christopher and however else we read from that moment forward, we are also reading his story with an eye to diagnosing him”(Wooden 283)

Many points of the novel that may suggest Christopher's disability are unreasoned. Reviewing Ray's many arguments on normalcy and how its constructs correlate with disability, and disproving Wooden's beliefs of the many symbols in the novel that confirm Christopher alleged disability, allowed me to witness how people with disabilities are restricted. One of the major confines people put on with disability, is this almost obsession and constant focus on, to them, perhaps a minuscule aspect of their life. To Christopher is was such a small aspect he didn't bother to mention weather he had a disability or not. To the reader some may feel short changed because it is never said or confirmed weather Christopher is disabled, but this arises the question of why should it matter? Instead Haddon chooses to release Christopher of any constraints people have put on him by concluding the novel with Christopher receiving the best possible score on his exam, successfully travel to London on his own, and solving the mystery of who killed the dog in the night-time.

Works Cited

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