Chapter II

Confronting the 'Normal'

"Determinism dominates everything"

-Emile Zola (*The Experimental Novel*)

The present chapter, focuses on examining ableism and its stereotypical lens towards disability. This chapter scrutinises the lives of individuals with disabilities portrayed in select literary texts from social perspectives, including ability, normalcy, and "crip." It highlights the muted voices of those with different disabilities and how society views their existence through a normative lens.

Disability often poses challenges in representing the body, as society typically defines ability based on an idealised body, while labelling those who deviate from this standard as 'defective' or 'deviant,' thereby categorising them as disabled. Consequently, the disabled body offers valuable insights into the socially constructed nature of all bodies. In their article "Models of disability: A brief overview," Marno Retief and Rantoa Letsosa cite Carlson, who asserts that disability is viewed as inherently negative, a pitiable condition that is perceived as "a personal tragedy for both the individual and her family, something to be prevented and, if possible, cured" (3). Consequently, social attitudes towards disability and the representation of the body significantly influence an individual's identity in society, as the notion of "normalcy" carries negative connotations for those with disabilities.

The concept of eugenics plays a pivotal role in determining one's abilities, and Sir Francis Galton established a modern system that involved identifying individuals based on their fingerprints. Mackenzie, in *Statistics in Britain*, suggests that "… one of the motivations for investigating personal identification is to identify independent features suitable for hereditary studies, leading to the idea that every person may possess visible and undeniable evidence of their lineage and close kinship" (65). Fingerprints are viewed as physical markers of an individual, akin to serial numbers inscribed on the body. This perception implies that the body possesses an immutable identity that dictates an individual's position, aptitude, intelligence, and role in society. This emphasis on eugenics and the pursuit of being "normal" marginalises those who do not fit into these categories, perceiving them as monstrous or deviant bodies.

The body plays a significant role in distinguishing between able and disabled bodies, as it experiences pain, joy, intense desire, and physical pleasure. The able body sets the standard for being "able," with the expectation that the vast majority should conform to the unrealistic ideals of the "normal" spectrum. This notion compels individuals to go to great lengths in order to fit within this normative scale. Dan Goodley, in *Dis/ability Studies: Theorising Disablism and Ableism,* quotes Kannen, who asserts that the social order is upheld by constructed categorisations of privilege and power, which determine the possibilities available to certain bodies while considering other bodies as "Other" (51). The normative scale has been constructed based on an idealised body that does not exist in reality. For instance, the Greek artist Zeuxis attempted to paint Aphrodite, the goddess of love, by using various female models, each possessing ideal body parts. This exemplifies that the myth or ideal body championed by able-bodied individuals is merely a figment of imagination. Nevertheless, many individuals endure pain in their pursuit of attaining a perfect body, aspiring to experience the luxury and privileges associated with able-bodiedness in society.

In recent times, the concept of 'ability' has not only evolved but has taken on a disturbing connotation, emphasising the negative consequences of disability and perpetuating the notion that being able-bodied is a privilege that affords one the opportunity to pass judgment on those with non-conforming bodies. Fiona Kumari Campbell boldly asserts that "ability" stands in direct opposition to disability, as it serves as a defining factor in an individual's social structure and status within society. It not only shapes perceptions but also establishes rigid standards for the body and mind, dictating societal norms that extend into both the present and future. Paradoxically, while purporting to define a liveable life, the very term 'ability' acts as an adversary to disability, reinforcing an illusionary construct that has been woven into the fabric of the society.

The notion of being able-bodied grants one the privilege of hope and a sense of security, leading them to believe that their existence holds greater worth than that of disabled individuals. Regrettably, those who fail to meet the prescribed standards are invalidated and relegated to a lesser extent, confined within the confines of a disability status. Douglas C. Baynton, in *The Disability Studies Reader*, draws attention to the distressing reality perpetuated by eugenics, quoting an official from the Eugenics Record Office who brazenly declares, "the only way to keep a nation strong mentally and physically is to see that each new generation is derived chiefly from the fitter members of the generation before" (24). This chilling statement exposes the extreme measures employed by eugenics to rid society of disability, perceiving it as a weakness that threatens the very fabric of a nation.

The perception of disability varies subjectively, as seen in Marcus Sergius' case, a Roman general who, despite facing amputation, underwent extensive surgery to align with societal norms. This fear of being labelled disabled drives individuals to extreme measures to avoid stigma, where ability equates to societal value. Disabled individuals face constant scrutiny, portraying ambiguity as deviation from the norm.

"Compulsory able-bodiedness," described by Robert McRuer and quoted by Fiona Kumari Campbell, persists as an unattainable ideal. "Ableism" encompasses the overvaluation of ableness, shaping laws, policies, and cultural values, impacting access to social benefits and legal protections (46).

A critical examination of 'ableism' within disability studies shifts the focus from disability as a self-contained category. Lennard Davis, in The *Disability Studies Reader*, illuminates the eugenics movement's central focus on "feeblemindedness," encompassing low intelligence, mental illness, and poverty (7). Ableism upholds the ideology of a healthy body, a normal mind, and the expectation of appropriate cognitive abilities and emotional expressions. Consequently, individuals with disabilities are marginalised, labelled feeble-minded, and deemed unworthy. As Robert F. Murphy states in *The Body Silent*, "… able-bodied individuals are confronted with constant visible reminders that their society is riddled with inequities and suffering, exposing the counterfeit paradise they inhabit and their inherent vulnerability" (55-56).

The concept of 'normalcy' is pivotal in understanding disability, as it challenges fixed characteristics attributed by the social model. Disability is viewed through this lens, where 'able' or 'disable' is determined by hegemonic societal norms, creating a crisis for those falling below the 'normal' scale. As Davis emphasises in *The Disability Studies Reader,* the focus should shift to examining the construction of normalcy itself, akin to recent scholarship on "race." The core issue lies not with the disabled individual but with how normalcy is constructed, perpetuating the 'problem' of disability (3).

In *The Disability Studies Reader,* Davis employs the "bell-shaped curve" model to elucidate the functioning of the normate and the portrayal of deviations within society. He explicates how the concept of the norm insinuates that the majority must conform, delineating a standard bell-shaped curve where deviations are highlighted. Davis underscores how this curve, known by various names including the “normal distribution” or simply “the bell curve,” becomes emblematic of the norm’s oppressive nature (6). Within this construct, deviations are inevitable, and individuals with disabilities are categorised as such, reflective of society’s normative tyranny.

In disability studies, deconstructing normalcy reveals the flaws in norming. Disability is seen as deviant, labelled ‘abnormal’ in able-bodied societies. Davis, in *The Disability Studies Reader*, illustrates this through Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, where Hippolyte’s club foot is deemed abnormal despite his acceptance. Society pressures him to conform, stripping him of his identity. Disability thus becomes equated with Otherness, reinforcing ableist norms (11).

Davis observes that characters in nineteenth-century novels often find themselves in abnormal situations, striving for normalcy. Disability isn’t just a theme in texts; it’s intricately woven into their narrative structures. Disability studies, with its plethora of theories and ideologies, highlights the diversity among able-bodied individuals rather than portraying disability negatively. For instance, the folktale of *Parayi Panthirukulam* from Kerala, where a disabled man refuses a cure for his elephantiasis, instead asking the goddess to change which leg it affects. Nathan interprets his condition not as a disability but as a unique difference. Similarly, contemporary disability discourse advocates for seeing disability not as a deficit but as a distinctive aspect of identity.

In *The Moon Children*, Billy, diagnosed with FASD, grapples with societal norms, experiencing social invisibility and bullying due to the prevailing belief in the superiority of able-bodied individuals. Sara White, in “Crippling the Archives,” distinguishes impairment as physical, sensory, or cognitive conditions causing limitations, while disability pertains to societal responses. White highlights, “Understanding disability as a form of oppression empowers people with disabilities to confront ableism” (114-15), shedding light on the empowerment found in acknowledging societal biases.

Illustrating this struggle against ableism, the novel’s protagonist, Billy, embodies unwavering determination despite academic obstacles. Through his fervent pursuit of yoyo mastery, he discovers a wellspring of confidence, envisioning scenarios where he surpasses able-bodied peers. A pivotal moment occurs during a performance when Billy momentarily falters, yet seamlessly continues, ultimately being hailed as “BILLY RAY, THE AMAZING YO-YO MASTER!” alongside recognition for his vocal talent. This instance encapsulates the triumph of perseverance and talent over prejudice (Brenna, *MC* 138).

Performing tricks, symbolic of power and mastery, becomes Billy’s empowering tool in a society dominated by able-bodied individuals. Seizing control of his narrative, he confronts barriers and prejudices imposed by his disability. With unwavering belief in his potential, Billy defies societal limitations, challenging preconceptions of disability. His determination showcases that ability transcends boundaries, emphasising that greatness isn’t limited by physical or cognitive differences.

In the novel, Billy’s father’s departure profoundly affects him, embedding a sense of abandonment that shapes his self-perception. Standing on the front steps afterward, he hurls a pebble at a bird, pondering his own worth. Internalising his father’s abandonment, he blames himself for perceived shortcomings, feeling envy and pain. The emotional turmoil escalates, threatening his sense of self-worth and potential, amplifying a lasting impact on his perception of his abilities. As he closes his eyes against memories of his father, Billy's inner turmoil manifests: "He felt as though inside him a storm was breaking free, ready to spill out and dislodge anything in its path" (Brenna, *MC* 12).

Furthermore, Billy's experience with FASD exacerbates his challenges, particularly in memory recall, worsening his self-confidence. He struggles with forgetting not only his parents' names but even his own, expressing frustration, "Billy knew he himself had a longer name, but just now he couldn't remember what it was" (Brenna, *MC* 15). These memory issues, stemming from his disability, fuel personal struggles and feelings of inadequacy. Billy keenly feels the impact of his disability on his daily life, relationships, and identity. Inability to recall significant details, like his parents' names, serves as a constant reminder of his perceived limitations, further eroding his self-assurance and causing distress.

The pressure of societal expectations and able-bodied norms imposes a tremendous burden on individuals with disabilities, as highlighted in the novel. Billy's poignant question to his mother, "Do you ever feel like there's a volcano inside you just waiting to erupt? Or a cyclone, or a flood? Or maybe lightning and thunder?" (Brenna, *MC* 16), encapsulates the inner turmoil experienced by disabled individuals who constantly grapple with the need to conform to societal standards. Unlike his able-bodied mother, who navigates through life without the need to prove herself, Billy finds himself consumed by the relentless pursuit of 'normalcy,' causing a profound erosion of his self-confidence and the struggle to live a life free from judgment and limitations.

Amid Billy's quest for acceptance, his FASD poses challenges, especially in reading and letter recognition. Misjudgement from others exacerbates his struggles, leading to marginalisation. During a visit to his mother's workplace, he faces difficulty reading a poolside signboard. This discomfort prompts him to inadvertently block the slide, depriving others of enjoyment. Bullied at school and beyond, he's unable to enjoy activities like his peers. Criticism comes from both children and adults, undermining his confidence: "'Hey, kid, what's the matter with you? Don't you know the rules?' The man who had crashed into him spoke angrily, pushing his long hair out of his eyes and reaching a tattooed arm for the side of the pool. 'What are you doing in here alone, anyway? I bet you just walked in off the street!'" (Brenna, *MC* 19).

In the context of FASD, individuals like Billy often exhibit distinctive facial features and various abnormalities, making them more susceptible to external scrutiny and stigmatisation. These visible differences further contribute to the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, magnifying their sense of otherness and reinforcing societal judgments and prejudices.

Billy's poolside encounters highlight the ongoing cycle of embarrassment and ridicule he faces due to able-bodied individuals' judgement. Confronted by a man who questions his presence and disregards his needs, Billy's mistake of bringing a dishtowel instead of a swimming towel adds to his perceived incompetence. Peers mock him, deepening his humiliation. Despite enduring persistent humiliation, Billy remains resilient, silently internalising his own inadequacy, "'Why am I so stupid?' he muttered as the hot water beat down on him... At school, it seemed that everything he did proved how dumb he was" (Brenna, *MC* 19). This relentless humiliation, combined with his struggles in expression, reinforces a negative self-image, perpetuating the damaging effects of ableism.

Tobin Siebers, as highlighted in *The Disability Studies Reader* edited by Davis, divulges the plight of individuals with invisible disabilities in conforming to societal norms. He emphasises the inherent challenges they face in aligning their true selves with societal expectations, a delicate balance between assimilation and self-acceptance. This perpetual pressure perpetuates self-doubt and ableist ideologies. Siebers succinctly captures this struggle, stating, "Many people are more comfortable relating to me and accommodating me if they can be absolutely certain that I am who I say I am, a deaf-blind person ..." (327).

In Billy's case, his struggles extend beyond the interactions with his peers; even his own father fails to comprehend his difficulties. As Billy's father pushes him to read, he expresses frustration and disappointment, emphasising the societal belief that reading is a fundamental measure of success: "'Come on, Billy, you've got to pay attention! You'll never amount to anything if you can't learn to read.' And Billy had tried to pay attention. The trouble was that no matter how hard he tried, something inside his head just wouldn't co-operate" (Brenna, *MC* 20). Despite Billy's earnest efforts, his father's fixation on the narrow definition of 'normal' prevents him from understanding his son's unique challenges. The pressure to conform to society's rigid expectations of normality often creates substantial barriers for individuals with disabilities, leading to feelings of isolation and exclusion. In Billy's case, the lack of understanding and support from his father exacerbates his already arduous journey toward acceptance.

Individuals with Asperger's Syndrome and those with FASD share social interaction difficulties and may experience meltdowns in unexpected situations. Brenda Smith Myles and Richard L. Simpson, in "Asperger's Syndrome: An Overview of Characteristics," note these traits, describing individuals with AS "as socially stiff, awkward, and emotionally blunted." They highlight the behavioural and emotional issues arising from social deficits, stressing the stress and loss of control experienced, leading to behavioural problems (133).

In the trilogy novels, Jane's journey mirrors the hurdles individuals with Asperger's Syndrome face in grasping social cues and expressions, leading to their detachment from others. A notable instance occurs when Jane's mother, Penelope, shifts conversation topics abruptly, leaving Jane perplexed after not allowing her to respond. This incident underscores the tendency of some individuals to prioritise self-expression over genuine interaction and comprehension of others. For individuals like Jane, afflicted with Asperger's Syndrome, decoding language and emotional signals poses challenges, fostering confusion and exasperation. Unlike neurotypical individuals adept at adapting communication and understanding cues, those with Asperger's Syndrome often struggle with empathy and interpreting metaphors and expressions. Jane encapsulates this struggle, lamenting, "My mother expects me to follow certain social scripts but then changes the rules unexpectedly... She labels it spontaneity, insisting one should anticipate varied responses in social settings. And people deem me peculiar!" (Brenna, *WO* 16).

Jane's attempt to engage in conversation with her mother illustrates a significant obstacle posed by her mother's use of social cues. This communication style, representative of able-bodied individuals, implies that children with invisible disabilities are expected to navigate barriers without exception and adapt seamlessly to their surroundings. Such expectations place an undue burden on individuals with invisible disabilities, such as Jane, when trying to communicate and connect with others.

Waiting for No One, a novel, effectively highlights Jane’s Asperger’s Syndrome while also shedding light on other disabilities, including Cerebral Palsy. The character Martin Phoenix, who is diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy, is portrayed as being infantilised by his father, Alan Phoenix. Despite the prevailing stigma surrounding Martin’s disability, Jane demonstrates genuine interest in getting to know him as an individual. The novel effectively exposes the stigmatisation and lack of empathy that able-bodied individuals often exhibit towards people with disabilities. This portrayal challenges able-bodied characters to re-evaluate their attitudes and perceptions of disabled individuals. Luke, taken aback by Jane’s positive attitude towards Martin, acknowledges this shift by stating, “Most people just want to know what’s wrong with him. Martin’s in grade seven and he’s twelve. He’s a pretty cool kid, even if Dad babies him too much” (Brenna, *WFNO* 113).

Alan Phoenix’s excessive protectiveness towards Martin serves as a form of oppression that hinders Martin’s independence and self-esteem. This attitude arises from the constant scrutiny that both Alan Phoenix and Martin face as a showcase for able-bodied individuals. The oppressive gaze directed at individuals with disabilities leads to a three-fold oppression, significantly impacting their self-esteem and sense of individuality.

Alan Phoenix’s excessive protectiveness towards Martin constitutes a form of oppression rooted in ableism, as it assumes Martin’s incapability due to his disability. This restricts Martin’s autonomy and undermines his self-esteem. Furthermore, both Alan and Martin face societal scrutiny, which pressures them to conform to able-bodied expectations, representing another facet of oppression. Lastly, the pervasive stigma and discrimination towards individuals with disabilities intensify their oppression, eroding their sense of self-worth and individuality, and perpetuating their exclusion from various societal spheres.

The inclusion of the short story “One of the Guys” in the anthology *Something to Hang on To* powerfully portrays Rodney, a character diagnosed with Down Syndrome, who faces underestimation and mistreatment from his teacher, Ms. Wineman. Throughout the story, Ms. Wineman demonstrates a lack of knowledge about ocean flags and intentionally feeds Rodney with incorrect information, hoping he will not question it. This incident vividly highlights the inadequacy of support and understanding provided to children with Down Syndrome, who require early intervention and specialised education to support their cognitive development.

As an educator, Ms. Wineman holds a significant responsibility to offer proper care and guidance to all students, including those with special needs. However, her disregard for Rodney’s specific educational requirements undermines his growth and development. By intentionally providing him with incorrect information, Ms. Wineman perpetuates a harmful cycle of underestimation and low expectations. This not only hampers Rodney’s learning experience but also reinforces the societal stigma surrounding disabilities and contributes to the marginalisation of individuals with Down Syndrome.

Rodney’s experience in “One of the Guys” serves as a microcosm of the broader challenges faced by individuals with Down Syndrome and other disabilities in society. It highlights the persistent misconceptions, underestimation, and disregard faced by those with visible disabilities.

In the novel *The White Bicycle*, Jane’s kindergarten teacher’s judgement is influenced by her preconceived notions about Jane’s diagnosis. She assumes that Jane cannot read the text and compares her to typically developing children, wrongly assuming that they may also struggle with reading. The teacher fails to recognise that Jane's disability only serves as a barrier and not as a problem that cannot be overcome with the right measures. Nonetheless, Jane proves her capabilities to her staff, demonstrating that her potential is not limited by her disability:

> 'Taylor can read,' my mother tells the teacher. 'I'm sure she isn't really reading this book, says the teacher …. I (Jane) stand up and go over to the teacher's desk. There is dictionary on the desk and I pick it up …. 'Webster's Dictionary,' I read the title …. 'Oh, my goodness,' says the teacher. 'I see what you mean. That is quite amazing.'
> (Brenna, *WB* 56)

Jane's Asperger's Syndrome, in fact, becomes a catalyst for her to achieve what seems impossible and undeniably showcases her disability as a strength rather than a mere barrier. Through her actions, it becomes evident that Jane not only challenges but surpasses the normative expectations set by able-bodied individuals for those with disabilities. She tirelessly proves that she is more than capable of creating her own opportunities and excelling on her own terms.

Jane's remarkable journey to Waskesiu unfurls amidst discomfort, a sensation amplified by the ceaseless motion around her, a stark reminder of her aversion to stillness. "I don't like sitting still, and I especially don't like sitting still while perceiving that things around me are moving," she muses, grappling with the disorienting feeling of inertia. The luminous glare of the sun, a formidable adversary to her sensitivity, casts its unwelcome radiance upon the landscape, intensifying her unease. "I don't like bright sunlight and today turns into a very bright day," she notes, her discomfort compounded by the glaring hues of yellow, an unwelcome reminder of the sun's oppressive presence (Brenna, *WO* 13).

Yet amidst the discomfort, Jane’s mother, cognizant of her daughter’s unique talents, suggests recourse to the map, trusting in Jane’s unparalleled ability to decipher its graphical intricacies. “Get the map and figure it out for yourself,” her mother instructs, tacitly acknowledging Jane’s proficiency in spatial navigation. Despite the challenges posed by her Asperger’s syndrome, Jane’s photogenic memory emerges as an indomitable strength, empowering her to transcend the confines of discomfort and navigate the spatial intricacies with unwavering precision. “So I do,” Jane affirms, her resolve undeterred by the adversities that beset her path (Brenna, *WO* 13).

This demonstration of Jane’s exceptional capabilities serves as a testament to the power of her Asperger’s Syndrome. It not only empowers her to overcome the challenges that come her way but also grants her a unique advantage in certain situations. Her ability to read maps effortlessly is not only a practical skill but also a powerful symbol of her resilience and determination. It serves as a clear manifestation of how her disability does not hinder her, but rather propels her forward, setting her apart from the expectations society often imposes on individuals with disabilities.

The trilogy featuring Jane demonstrates the unique strengths of individuals with disabilities, particularly her own journey with Asperger’s Syndrome. Excelling academically and professionally, Jane values the visual presentation of information due to her excellent visual memory. Despite initial jealousy from Alan Phoenix, he later acknowledges her capabilities, fostering their friendship and admiring her artistic talent. Jane’s photogenic memory, rooted in her autism, brings both positive and negative impacts, complemented by her organisational skills and perfectionism. Yet, these traits also heighten her awareness of her surroundings and lead her to be critical, such as towards her mother’s boyfriend, Danny. Reflecting on her condition, Jane acknowledges the strengths and challenges it presents, stating, “... some of it is a strength and some of it isn't. But most characteristics could be either smart or bad, depending on the situation. So I left it in" (Brenna, *WFNO* 6). Her autism renders her both resilient and vulnerable, navigating life's uncertainties with uncertainty about triggers and societal norms.

Jane's condition imposes restrictions on her access and amplifies the significance of even minor tasks. For instance, the prohibition of swear words both at home and in her educational environment feels overly confining to Jane. Despite channelling her creativity into writing her own novel through journals, she still feels constrained by this limitation on her freedom of expression. Jane articulates, "I wasn't allowed to swear on the laptop I used in high school, and I think this jeopardized my rights and freedoms. People should be able to swear if they want to, even if it's a bad habit, whether they have special needs or not" (Brenna, *WFNO* 94-95). Her instructors and her mother's-imposed barriers evoke frustration, hindering her personal growth and her ability to fully express herself.

Writing serves as a catalyst for Jane, instilling in her a sense of confidence and empowerment to navigate her life. This is evident when she attends a job interview at a bookstore in *Waiting for No One*, where she proudly showcases her organisational skills, communication abilities, and even mentions her novel. However, despite her accomplishments, Jane's label as someone with autism renders her more susceptible to criticism and judgment from others, leaving her vulnerable. Nevertheless, she perseveres, determined to forge ahead and create a life where she can feel accomplished and accepted.

During her trip to visit her father in Wyoming, Jane experiences a newfound sense of capability and independence. Embarking on the journey alone with her pet gerbil, Harold, she successfully completes the bus journey and reflects on her achievement, remarking, "I have made it...This is the first time I have taken a bus journey by myself. It occurs to me to pat myself on the back, although I know that this is just something people say rather than do" (Brenna, *WFNO* 63). Jane's ability to navigate the trip without her mother's assistance, potentially laden with judgment based on her disability, instils within her a profound sense of confidence and pride in her abilities.

Jane is determined to defy the stereotypes imposed upon her following her diagnosis, making a genuine effort in France. Initially requesting her mother's accompaniment to meet Adelaide in Cassis, whom she had met previously, Jane is met with a decline and the suggestion to call Adelaide instead. Resolute in not wanting to be like Stanley from Harold Pinter's play, she takes matters into her own hands, planning a solo trip to Cassis. Recognising the bus stop at the end of her lane and carefully constructing an itinerary to arrive in Cassis in time for aperitifs, Jane seeks to prove to her mother that she is fully capable of accomplishing tasks independently, urging her mother to relinquish control at times.

Jane's bid to assert her independence in France is thwarted by her mother's persistent efforts to control her. Despite Jane's wish to visit Cassis, Penelope steers her towards other activities, such as fortified village tours and cooking classes, seemingly aiming to provoke a meltdown. Even when Jane plans to work as a personal care assistant for Martin Phoenix, Penelope imposes herself on the trip, seeking dominance. Nevertheless, Jane stands firm on visiting Cassis, refusing activities that don't interest her and pushing back against her mother's attempts to infantilise her. Asserting her stance, Jane states, "'I don't want to take a cooking class'… I don't expect to keep hearing about it from you. If you think a cooking class is so interesting, you should take one" (Brenna, *WB* 133). She underscores the need for mutual trust and respect, seeking a relationship where both her and her mother's needs are acknowledged.

Dan Goodley argues in *Dis/ability Studies: Theorising Disablism and Ableism* that the societal fixation on 'normalcy' poses significant challenges for those with disabilities. This fixation drives able-bodied individuals to assign blame to disabled individuals and relegates their needs to peripheral concerns despite various aid programs being in place. Goodley emphasises how societal obsession with individual bodies and biology, shaped by institutional and scientific discourse, perpetuates the notion of "a normative model of humanity," ultimately marginalising those who do not conform (4).

Goodley contends that individuals with intellectual disabilities encounter not mere problems, but crises in accessing transportation, technology, support, and acceptance in school and work communities. He asserts that these crises stem from societal structures that imperil the existence of those cognitively different from the mainstream. Despite societal perceptions, disabled individuals often demonstrate capabilities beyond able-bodied expectations, unsettling notions of normality among the non-disabled.

In *Keywords*, Tanya Titchkosky's concept of normality centres on critically examining disability to scrutinise normative notions encompassing physical and social dimensions, including intellect, body, emotions, and senses. Titchkosky contends that the able-bodied project normality as static, deeming those with unwanted conditions as abnormal. Lennard Davis, cited by Titchkosky, suggests that the construction of a normative order necessitates rendering "humans knowable through norms and signifying totalities" (372). Consequently, Titchkosky posits that normality is perceived as the dominant self in modern society, fostering comparisons and fostering the assumption that a normal life is the sole acceptable standard. The notion of normate norms underscores that normality exists within a relational system rather than as an inherent condition. Disability studies reveal how normalcy is constructed to marginalise disability, highlighting that the issue lies not with disability itself but with the societal construction of normality. Moreover, disability studies demonstrate that normality is not fixed but evolves over time. Despite the prevalence of disabilities, social acceptance remains elusive, perpetuating a norm dictated by the majority.

Titchkosky further cites Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s perspective on the concept of “normal,” which offers valuable insight. Garland-Thomson argues that the constructed identity of those who conform to normative “bodily configurations and cultural capital grants them authority and power” (374). This underscores how adhering to normative standards empowers individuals to exert authority over those with disabilities, reinforcing the notion that disability holds lesser value in society. Moreover, normalcy standards contribute to other forms of dehumanisation, marginalising individuals and pushing them to the edges of existence.

Disability studies reveals that ability varies across groups, perceptions, and locations, challenging the notion of fixed ability. Despite most people experiencing disability at some point, it remains unrecognised within social structures, enforcing a standard of ‘normalcy’ dictated by the dominant population. This pressure leads able-bodied individuals to suppress differences, perpetuating stigma against minority groups like people with disabilities. Goffman describes this as a process where societal norms work against marginalised groups. Rod Michalko, in *The Difference that Disability Makes*, emphasises the “abnormality of striving for normalcy,” highlighting the importance of analysing its construction (82).

The term ‘normal’ frequently serves as a means of prejudice against disabled individuals, significantly impacting those who are differently-abled. Billy, for example, is subject to bullying from his classmates who use the concept of normality to assert dominance over him. Despite being aware of these comments, Billy is unable to defend himself due to his inability to read, making him even more vulnerable. “Sometimes, the other kids would write notes about him. Billy knew this because he’d find them sometimes, small scraps of paper with his name on them, but he couldn’t read what they said. He just knew they said bad things” (Brenna *MC*, 20-21). Billy feels helpless as nobody seems willing to understand his needs or his unique circumstances.

Jane and Billy’s father exhibit similar parenting styles, both neglecting their responsibilities towards their children and failing to grasp their disabilities. They opt to ignore their children’s conditions and coerce them into adhering to societal norms of ‘normalcy,’ further complicating their circumstances. Instead of recognising their children’s disabilities, they impose their own ideals of normalcy onto them. This behaviour, termed projection by Sigmund Freud, serves as a coping mechanism for individuals to evade confronting uncomfortable truths about themselves and their environment.

Billy demonstrates his capability to independently remember to take his medication, highlighting the variability of normalcy across different contexts. Understanding the significance of his medication in managing his hyperactivity, Billy takes it without assistance to maintain control over his behaviour. As depicted in the text, “Billy remembered he was supposed to eat breakfast. He ran out to the kitchen and took his pill ...” (Brenna, *MC* 34). While taking medication is a routine practice for both disabled and non-disabled individuals to maintain their health, society often stigmatises those with disabilities for doing so, contrasting with the acceptance of medication use among the able-bodied. The concept of normalcy is thus perceived differently depending on one's ability status.

Similar to Billy, Jane faces social prejudice due to her disability, enduring constant criticism of her actions. At school, she grapples with the challenge of focusing on multiple tasks simultaneously, a common difficulty encountered by individuals with Asperger's Syndrome. In her book, *The White Bicycle*, Jane offers insight into her experience: "It is hard to pay attention to the teacher when there are so many other things in the room to hear and see …. Bright colors pulse from every corner of the room – from the walls and even from the ceiling where artwork hangs on strings. It's too much work to look at him even though I know he wants me to." (Brenna 61)

Jane encounters difficulty focusing on her teacher amidst distractions, extending to situations where she could stand out positively. Despite attempts to socialise, her lack of social skills leaves her feeling isolated and uncertain, struggling to adhere to norms and show empathy. Consequently, she avoids eye contact and conversation, inviting criticism. Unfortunately, her teacher worsens her situation by offering no support and instead criticising her behaviour. Even during class, Jane struggles, expressing frustration when she can't complete phonetics exercises, leading to tears. Despite her evident difficulties, her tutor fails to offer necessary attention, reacting angrily instead. This highlights the sad reality where children like Jane are often seen as burdens, denied essential care and accommodations. The constant stress of not fitting in adds to Jane's struggle, her disability making even simple exercises challenging. She laments, "I don't know why they didn't fill in the blanks when they made the book …. I do not know how to fill in the words …. The teacher was angry that I put numbers in where letters are supposed to be. I start to cry" (Brenna, *WB* 62).

Furthermore, Jane's eidetic memory has both positive and negative effects on her life, as her peers both benefit from and bully her for her exceptional ability. On one hand, her photographic memory allows her to excel in her studies and easily remember information. For example, she demonstrated her remarkable talent for reading at a very young age. However, on the other hand, her classmates view her ability with suspicion and make fun of her by creating humorous notes and asking her to read aloud in class. These actions insinuate that she is making up words on her own:

> I can read Mr. Lock's classroom dictionary and it is easier …. The other kids cluster around when I pick up grade one dictionary. 'Read it!' they demand, and when I do, they mutter among themselves …. They start bringing things written on pieces of paper for me to read. 'I am turd,' I read, turning over the paper …. 'Turn me over and I am still a turd.' Someone spins me around and everyone laughs. I am confused (Brenna, *WB* 64).

Mrs. Caron, Jane's art instructor, lacks effective communication with Jane, often talking down to her and demanding tasks without confirming her understanding. Jane seeks companionship but faces unjust punishment for expressing dissatisfaction with Mrs. Caron. Typing "over and under" (Brenna, *WB* 65) on the computer, Jane unconsciously signals distress, yet those around her fail to recognise it, opting to pass judgment instead.

Unlike her peers, Jane finds solace in journaling to express her feelings. While others resort to verbal or physical conflict resolution, Jane values writing as an escape, providing a safe distance to reflect on events. She recalls Aristotle’s quote, “The pen is mightier than the sword,” recognising the power of her writing to avoid confrontation (Brenna, *WB* 10). Through her journal, Jane gains confidence in communicating her thoughts and emotions. Yet, her unconventional style faces scrutiny, despite its similarity in thought processes with her peers.

Jane’s exceptional memory power prompts her to draw comparisons between herself and J.D. Salinger’s protagonist in *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden. She discovers striking similarities between them, including their age and level of maturity. Jane expresses her deep dismay with society’s attitude towards her, feeling utterly disgusted by the way she is treated. Similarly, to Holden, she finds solace in using a journal to vent her frustrations, just as he does in The *Catcher in the Rye*.:

> … I said that Holden and I are exactly alike … most of the time, like Holden, I’m mad and disgusted with people, which is true. I also said that he wasn’t looking forward to much and that I’m the same way. She advised me to keep a journal and said that sometimes it feels good to let off steam in print. (11-12)

Numerous incidents reveal Jane’s behavioural patterns overridden by her mother in pursuit of normalcy. Jane’s habit of repeating actions seven times during meltdowns deems her unconventional. Perceptions vary during crises, yet individuals with disabilities face heightened scrutiny. As Jane articulates, “... words are very important. They are the bridges between people’s thoughts. When you need to do something seven times to feel relaxed, it’s just better to do it and enjoy the outcome .... Most people would agree with my mother, which makes me a minority. However, this does not mean that I am wrong. In fact, I would argue that I am correct” (Brenna, *WO* 25).

For individuals with Asperger's Syndrome, routine is crucial for well-being and stability. Jane, for example, experiences profound discomfort when her routine is disrupted. During her stay in Waskesiu, her routine changes unexpectedly, causing her distress. She expresses her unhappiness, saying, "I am too far from my church in Saskatoon. I cannot attend church here in Waskesiu .... I am unhappy about this because I am accustomed to attending church every Sunday, and I do not like changes in my routine" (Brenna, *WO* 38).

Furthermore, Jane's trip to France exemplifies how disruptions to routine profoundly affect individuals with Asperger's Syndrome. When their flight is delayed, causing them to miss their connecting flight and spend the night in New York, Jane's discomfort with the abrupt change becomes apparent. She explains, "When one thing changes, everything changes" (Brenna, *WB* 13). Despite her attempts to manage the situation, restlessness consumes her, and she teeters on the verge of a meltdown. Meanwhile, Penelope remains preoccupied with trip preparations, leaving Jane to cope alone.

Moreover, Jane faces another disruption to her routine during her trip to France when her luggage is delayed, shattering her expectations of its timely arrival. This unexpected event profoundly impacts her mental state, causing her stress levels to soar and resulting in a distressing meltdown that her mother struggles to manage. During a car ride with Alan Phoenix, Jane's distress escalates further as she struggles to discern whether his comments are real or imagined. Describing her efforts to manage her overwhelming emotions, she says, "I can't tell if he really said that or if he's just talking about firewood. I take a deep breath, and then I take another" (Brenna *WB* 21). Unfortunately, Alan's loud voice only worsens the situation, prompting Jane to question why her meltdowns face criticism and scrutiny while those of ‘normal’ individuals do not. This poignant example powerfully underscores the pervasive stigmatisation experienced by individuals with disabilities and emphasises the urgent need for greater understanding and support.

Furthermore, Jane’s life is perpetually marked by constant control from her mother and society, which takes an immense toll on her mental health and overall well-being. This kind of curfew, in particular, has a devastating impact on Jane’s obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), intensifying her obsessions and making them increasingly difficult to manage. As she astutely articulates, “My obsessive cleaning doesn’t work for its purpose, and no matter what I do, I can’t make myself believe things are clean. In fact, the more I clean, the more I seem to want to clean” (Brenna, *WFNO* 96). The unrealistic expectations placed on individuals with disabilities by society fail to account for.

Effective communication is undoubtably an essential aspect of society as it enables individuals to gain a deeper understanding of various perspectives. However, disabled individuals often encounter significant communication difficulties due to their unique ways of interacting with others. Unfortunately, able-bodied people tend to unfairly judge and discriminate against these individuals, creating significant challenges for their full integration into society. The short story “Finding Your Voice” vividly portrays this issue through the experiences of Janine and Samantha, who demonstrate how disabled individuals can connect and empathise with each other despite societal differences.

In Janine’s case, her mother’s failure to provide the necessary support leads to her being cared for by Aunt Edna, and her lack of empathy eventually results in Janine living in foster care. Similarly, Samantha, diagnosed with Muscular Dystrophy, faces substantial challenges in society due to pervasive discrimination. As quoted by

Marjoriel L. Baldwin and William G. Johnson in “Labour Market Discrimination against Women with Disabilities,” Blackwell Stratton et al. emphasise that throughout history, disabled people have been regarded as incomplete human beings, labelled as “defectives.” They were subjected to persecution, neglect, and even death (558). While persecution has gradually been replaced by pity, the exclusion and segregation of disabled individuals have remained unchallenged.

The negative effects of alleged discrimination on differently abled individuals include invisibility, loss of identity, and trauma. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha’s work *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* emphasises this, revealing that able-bodied individuals often exhibit ‘blank stares’ and fail to acknowledge the knowledge and experiences of disabled individuals. This perpetuates an ableist norm, forcing those who do not fit into it to apologise for their differences. Staring, in particular, can have profound and damaging effects on disabled individuals, leaving them feeling isolated and ashamed. Jane’s experiences in the novel *Wild Orchid* serve as a poignant example, enduring numerous meltdowns and eventually resorting to sitting inside a cardboard box at school to escape the constant scrutiny of her peers. Such surveillance-like treatment pushes disabled individuals to hide their talents, leading to feelings of suppression and discouragement. Additionally, June and Martin internalise societal norms, allowing them to control their lives. June allows her disease to define her and dictate her actions, while Martin relinquishes control to his father and others due to his disability.

Parenting is a pivotal role in guiding children through the intricacies of society, often serving as their initial guide. Yet, parents of disabled children may grapple with accepting their child’s disability, particularly if it was unforeseen. In Janine’s case, her mother’s inability to grasp her daughter’s needs leads to a facade of concern in public, while at home, her behaviour paints a different picture, as Janine recalls, “her mother’s eyes would be clear as glass. Janine would the off her shoes, and even when it was cold, would tiptoe across the purple sand until her toes were numb. Magic sand, her mother called it … Inside the house, her mother was different, too. Janine remembers that inside the house her mother was loud and had tangled hair and angry eyes” (Brenna *STHOT* 58).

In “Finding Your Voice,” Samantha’s wheelchair and Janine’s social struggles highlight their bond, with Janine pushing Samantha’s wheelchair and standing by her with empathy. Mrs. Desjarlais suggests they are the “true teachers,” showcasing mutual support among those with disabilities (Brenna *STHOT* 64). This underscores the societal construct of ‘normalcy’ that unfairly judges and marginalises those who deviate from able-bodied norms.

Billy’s FASD is a direct consequence of his mother’s negligent alcohol consumption during pregnancy. However, instead of abandoning her son, she chooses to take responsibility and becomes more cautious during her second pregnancy. This exemplifies the pivotal role of motherhood in the lives of individuals with disabilities. Mothers prioritise their children’s well-being and perceive them not as burdens but as individuals deserving of love and support.

In the face of pressure from Zak to drink, Billy’s mother resists, considering the welfare of both her unborn baby and Billy. She refrains from casting Zak in a negative light in front of Billy, recognising his admiration for his father. As she states, “‘Zak wasn’t always like this. It’s just the booze talking - at least that’s what they say in my AA meetings’” (Brenna, *MC* 62). Her care for Billy acts as a shield, protecting him from potentially traumatising realities if he were to uncover them.

While Billy’s mother acknowledges her role in causing his FASD, she transforms her care for him into a mission to secure a better future. She diligently reminds him to take his medication after meals and discourages self-pity over his father’s abandonment. Despite being pregnant with her second child, she willingly crawls under the table to comfort Billy and assist him with his mood swings. For individuals like Billy, diet plays a crucial role, as processed foods can trigger hyperactive behaviour due to chemical reactions in their bodies. However, Chrysta faces challenges in consistently providing home-cooked meals for Billy. Consequently, she buys him a donut for breakfast, leading to his hyperactive behaviour. Whenever Billy feels down due to his reading difficulties or motor skill failures, Chrysta comforts him and blames herself for his condition. As the exchange follows:

> ‘I am so stupid!’ he screamed. ‘Do you know what it’s like? There’s stuff everywhere that people are reading and I can’t figure it out. And people are always mad at me!’ ‘It’s not your fault,’ his mother whispered. ‘Oh, Billy listen. It’s not your fault.’ ‘Well, whose fault is it?’ cried Billy. ‘I put my shoes on the wrong feet and that I can’t sit still. Whose fault is it that the only words I can read are baby words?’ ‘Billy,’ said his mother, and stopped. Then she took a deep breath and went on. ‘I guess […] I guess it’s my fault,’ she said ‘I did a lot of drinking. Maybe it affected you, I’m not sure, but the doctors […] they said […] they said it did.’ (Brenna *MC* 69-70)

Within the narrative, Chrysta experiences a sudden outburst in front of Billy, expressing her regret for subjecting him to immense challenges at a tender age. The consequences of her past mistakes have resulted in detrimental effects on Billy’s health and have profoundly impacted his psychological well-being, all within the context of societal norms. It becomes evident that the normative order not only presents obstacles for individuals with disabilities but also for the parents who have given birth to them. The normative standard assumes that able-bodied individuals, or ‘normates,’ possess an inherent ability to readily recognise and direct attention towards behaviours deemed abnormal within the community.

In a dialectic of advantages and disadvantages, the concept of the ‘normate’ emerges. Throughout the narrative, alongside characters such as Chrysta and Natasha, Mrs. Schmidt’s approach towards Billy resonates deeply with him. Mrs. Schmidt’s perspective represents a departure from the normative framework as she embraces and accepts Billy for who he is, eschewing any expectation of conformity. Drawing from her firsthand experience of her husband’s cancer diagnosis, Mrs. Schmidt possesses a nuanced understanding of the challenges accompanying invisible disabilities. Within her familial setting, she diligently fosters an environment wherein Billy’s seemingly mischievous conduct is viewed as playful rather than a manifestation of inherent flaw or deviation.

Billy’s Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) renders him prone to restlessness and an inability to maintain stillness. However, while in Mrs. Schmidt’s home, he exhibits an enhanced ability to manage his anxiety. In a poignant scene, Mrs. Schmidt offers Billy pancakes, and he, in turn, diligently occupies his place at the table, endeavouring to control his restlessness. The narrative aptly depicts this moment, stating, “He always sits down at Mrs. Schmidt’s to eat because he knows it’s not proper to stand. He crosses and uncrosses his legs, trying to fight off restlessness” (Brenna, *MC* 24). Mrs. Schmidt’s perceptive understanding of Billy’s idiosyncratic behaviour creates an environment wherein he feels a sense of belonging and acceptance. This transformative experience motivates Billy to actively seek connections beyond the confines of his immediate family. In stark contrast to his father’s approach to his disability, which engendered a profound void within Billy and led him to internalise blame for his father’s abandonment, Mrs. Schmidt’s nurturing presence provides a haven where Billy can authentically express himself, shielded from the pressures of conforming to societal norms. She wholeheartedly embraces him, effectively dismantling any sense of marginalisation or ostracisation he might otherwise experience as an ‘abnormal’ individual within the normative framework.

In the novel, Natasha’s abandonment at an orphanage as an infant leaves her voiceless and vulnerable to violence. Despite being adopted by the Arnolds, who provide for her basic needs, she remains marginalised. Mrs. Schmidt’s revelation that many children in orphanages have living parents unable to care for them adds a layer of complexity to Natasha’s situation. Mrs. Schmidt remarks, “‘Lots of those children aren’t really orphans. The TV shows say that many of them have parents who are too poor to look after them ….’” (Brenna, *MC* 86). Natasha’s biological mother’s unfulfilled expectations and societal norms deeply affect her emotional health.

In *Wild Orchid*, Jane faces suffocating control from her mother, inhibiting her freedom and personal growth. Her mother’s forceful demand, “‘Don’t you want me to have a life!’ she yelled, ‘Why can’t you just do this one thing? You’d like it there if you gave it a chance,’” exemplifies this oppressive dynamic (Brenna 8). Despite her mother’s intentions to care for her, Jane feels manipulated and constrained. Additionally, constant interruptions from Penelope exacerbate Jane’s distress, as she struggles to express herself. Amidst discussing gerbils, Jane’s mother sharply interjects, commanding her to cease worrying and assuring her that everything will be fine.

Penelope’s distress, stemming from Jane’s challenging behaviour, hampers their outings. Jane’s anxiety and frequent meltdowns exacerbate Penelope’s longing for relief from single parenthood, amplifying her desire for freedom. In instances where Jane becomes overwhelmed and resorts to hyperventilation in response to unfamiliar experiences, Penelope’s maternal instincts take over. Despite struggling to guide Jane through these situations, Penelope often assumes control and convinces her daughter that she is incapable of managing in new environments. As depicted in the passage, Penelope employs the strategy of creating a mental image for Jane as a means to help her regain composure, “‘We’re so lucky we get to stay right beside the lake,’ Mom said. ‘I bet you can’t wait to see what your room will look like.’ 'Does it have an outhouse?’ I asked, starting to hyperventilate, and she shoved my water bottle at me again.... Taylor take one thing at a time.’” (Brenna, *WO* 17). While Penelope insists on dragging Jane along, she displays genuine concern for her daughter.

Garth Simon, by adopting convenient excuses, justifies his abandonment, citing self-preservation instincts and a desire for his daughter’s mental well-being. This allows him to neglect his parental duties during Jane’s meltdowns. Jane, reflecting on her father’s actions, keenly observes, “When I started doing really well at some things, like writing and math, my dad let me come to Cody, Wyoming, to visit. I think you should be a parent whether the kids do well or not” (Brenna, *WO* 31). In these lines, Jane’s father symbolises the prevailing attitude towards individuals with disabilities, capitalising on vulnerabilities. His pursuit of normalcy, combined with an inability to embrace difference or cope with challenges, exposes profound deficiencies in his parenting.

At the tender age of eight, Jane faces the heart-wrenching experience of her father, Garth Simon, severing ties upon learning about her condition. Tragically, Jane’s attempts to find solace in medication exacerbate her situation, leading to frequent meltdowns within the confines of her own home. Consequently, her parents find themselves grappling with the profound challenge of providing appropriate assistance to their struggling daughter. It is Garth Simon’s decision to abandon Jane that leaves an indelible mark on her young mind, as she poignantly reflects, “I think my Dad leaves because of my problems .... I think him leaving really sucks. Being a good parent is helping your kids when they have problems, not disappearing” (Brenna, *WO* 14). This introspective statement serves to underscore both Jane’s deep yearning for parental support and her unwavering expectations of her father as a vulnerable child, as well as her mother’s parallel struggle.

Jane’s father, in the aftermath of his abandonment, displays an evident lack of effort in understanding his daughter or fostering a continued connection with her and her mother. Instead, he chooses to forge new relationships with other women, leaving Jane to grapple with a sense of abandonment. A poignant example arises when he invites Jane to spend the holidays with him but fails to account for her reliance on a clock—a vital tool for managing her daily priorities. This unforeseen lapse triggers a meltdown, leading Jane to reflect, “Anyway, not having the clock is probably the beginning of the end of my visit to Dad’s” (Brenna, *WO* 23). Tragically, Jane’s father proves ill-equipped to navigate such a situation, leaving Penelope, her mother, to step in and shoulder the responsibility of caring for their distressed daughter.

In *Waiting for No One*, Jane’s father’s irrational actions serve as an enduring scar etched deep within her heart. The repercussions of his abandonment foster within Jane a pervasive sense of insecurity, fuelling an ever-present fear of being abandoned by others. Jane’s poignant recollection encapsulates this anguish, as she reveals, “... I was already afraid that someone who went away would never come back. I can remember feeling terrible every time my father went to work ... I couldn’t predict that he would come home ...” (Brenna 24). This lingering doubt regarding her place in the world serves as a lasting testament to the profound impact of her father’s callous treatment.

Penelope, Jane’s mother, plays a complex role, oscillating between saviour and complicator in Jane’s life. While shielding Jane from societal norms, Penelope’s protective nature also grants her power over Jane. During their trip to Waskesiu, Penelope abruptly ends her relationship with Danny and insists Jane return home with her. When Jane resists, Penelope manipulates her, claiming she can’t survive alone due to her condition. This manipulation triggers a meltdown in Jane, who feels miserable considering others’ perspectives. As Jane reflects, “The more I thought about this, the worse I felt until I was crying a little ...” (Brenna, *WO* 128). Penelope’s sudden shift highlights the fickle nature of societal norms, often favouring able-bodied individuals. The breakdown in communication between Jane and Penelope mirrors the broader communication gap between able-bodied and disabled individuals.

In examining relationship dynamics, Jane sees herself mirroring her mother’s approach. She reflects on her mother’s pattern of changing partners, believing it has hindered her ability to maintain meaningful connections. Jane vividly recalls an incident with Kody, hoping for romance but left deeply upset when he attempted an unwanted kiss. Blaming herself, she questions her efforts to secure Kody’s commitment: “I started thinking how it wasn’t fair that Mom had all these boyfriends ... while I had none even though I’d really tried hard to have one” (Brenna *WO* 128-129). This introspective moment reveals Jane grappling with self-doubt and societal expectations in her pursuit of love.

Penelope’s influence extends beyond Jane’s romantic entanglements and seeps into her professional life as well. Penelope imposes her expectations on Jane, dictating the precise manner in which her CV should be crafted, devoid of Jane’s individual agency. Jane recounts, “When I wrote my resume, I meticulously followed the models provided by my high school teacher last year ... I felt a sense of pride in the final result. However, my mother—who threw a tantrum in her bedroom because I did not adhere to her prescribed format—expressed no pride in my accomplishments” (Brenna, *WFNO* 4). Penelope’s actions overshadow her daughter, subtly exerting control over Jane. This behaviour underscores the power dynamics that manifest between able-bodied individuals and those with disabilities, subjecting the latter to constant

In *Waiting for No One*, Jane deliberately withholds the details of her interview with Mrs. Thomson from her mother. She harbours a fear that her mother’s perspective will overshadow her own, engendering confusion and muddling her sense of self. Jane articulates, “... I yearn to preserve this memory in solitude, for once my mother becomes privy to it, she will impose her own perspective upon mine, resulting in a perplexing amalgamation of ideas” (Brenna 27). Jane resolutely strives to emancipate herself from the clutches of her mother’s influence. She recognises that her mother’s involvement will only serve to complicate matters, engendering self-doubt as her mother’s ideals frequently clash with Jane’s own deeply-held convictions.

During her time in Wyoming, Garth Simon takes Jane to witness a bullfight, where she bears witness to the harrowing cruelty inflicted upon the bull within the ring. Jane’s compassion for the suffering animal resonates profoundly as she observes, “One bull, in particular, exhibits such relentless defiance that I fear they may never succeed in removing him from the ring ... I catch a fleeting glimpse of the desperation in his eyes. It dawns on me that he is not deranged but rather trapped in a state where oxygen deprivation causes certain regions of his brain to shut down" (Brenna, *WFNO* 69). Jane's empathy towards the bull emanates from her own experiences of marginalisation and mistreatment at the hands of able-bodied individuals. Moved by her own history of adversity, she is compelled to intervene, safeguarding the bull from further harm.

In a normate perspective, Jane's experiences reveal a pattern where she recognises positive qualities in others, but such recognition is seldom reciprocated. Her identity becomes intertwined with her Asperger's Syndrome, causing her to be perceived as inherently different. This perception is exemplified by the return of her father, who was a source of torment during her formative years. His attempts to reconnect with Jane are shallow and narrow-minded, driven by a desire to showcase to his new girlfriend that he cares for his disabled daughter, albeit without truly understanding or embracing her unique needs. He expects Jane to accompany him for Thanksgiving, yet fails to assume full responsibility for her well-being, as he prioritises his own life. Furthermore, he expects Jane to accept his girlfriend without considering her own preferences and emotional well-being. Garth Simon's behaviour reflects the inherent selfishness that stems from the pursuit of 'normalcy,' whereby able-bodied individuals demonstrate superficial care for the differently abled while secretly seeking relief from any association with disability.

Garth Simon witnesses one of Jane's meltdowns at his residence, leading him to intervene to manage the situation, especially in front of Sadie Richard, causing him embarrassment. Despite his efforts, he views Jane as unreliable and burdensome due to her lack of training in handling such situations. Both Garth Simon and Sadie

Richard, who are considered normates, have authority over Jane, making interactions uneven. Garth Simon expects Jane to behave appropriately during her meltdowns, an unrealistic demand. This leaves Jane feeling helpless and disheartened by her father's expectations. Her cognitive abilities are severely affected when her pet Harold goes missing, triggering distress. Individuals with Asperger's Syndrome, like Jane, struggle with uncertainty and become fixated on resolving issues until they are resolved. Jane shares her perspective:

> … I don't see him. He is missing from his cage …. I start to yell and for a little while I don't know what I am doing. I know that I am running into the kitchen and there are lot of big sounds. Then I realize that my dad has me around the shoulders in a bear hug …. 'Hush now Taylor, you did that when you were letting off steam,' my father says. 'Time to clean up, and then we'll figure out …. (Brenna, *WFNO* 84-85)

Within the normate framework, these dynamics underscore the power imbalances that arise when able-bodied individuals assume control over the lives of those with disabilities. Jane's father, driven by societal pressures to conform to a narrow definition of 'normal,' fails to comprehend the true essence of care and support, inadvertently reinforcing the notion that the differently abled are objects of pity and burden. Jane's experiences serve as a poignant reminder of the marginalisation and devaluation faced by individuals with disabilities within normate-dominated societies. The incident involving the crib further illuminates the impact of normate expectations on disabled individuals, highlighting how terms like 'Crip,' derived from derogatory language, perpetuate negative perceptions and contribute to discrimination and marginalisation. This categorisation reflects the historical and ongoing oppression faced by disabled individuals, emphasising the need for societal change and a shift towards more inclusive attitudes and behaviours.

In the novel *The Moon Children*, the circus serves as a powerful symbol of inclusivity and acceptance for Billy, a child with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). The circus environment allows Billy to witness people of different abilities working together without any distinctions or prejudices. It becomes a place where Billy can momentarily escape the limitations imposed by his condition and find joy in the diverse performances. As the book states, “Billy loved the circus. He loved the sounds, the colours, the smells. He loved the acts, and how you could watch more than one thing at once” (Brenna 31).

Billy’s mother, consumed by her drinking disorder, neglects his needs in Favor of saving for her unborn baby, reflecting societal norms that prioritise able-bodied individuals over disabled ones. This neglect worsens Billy’s well-being, echoing the marginalisation experienced by disabled individuals in society. The pervasive societal belief that disability equates to being less human creates a hostile environment for them. Able-bodied individuals, like Billy’s father Zak, perpetuate this belief by treating disabled individuals as burdens, reinforcing self-stigmatisation and a cycle of marginalisation. This highlights the damaging impact of normate expectations on disabled individuals, fostering feelings of self-blame and perpetuating societal oppression:

> Except that my dad isn’t here right now. He’s – ‘Billy tried to think of something to say that would make sense, but couldn’t think of anything. “—He’s just gone, I guess,’ he said, finally ‘I don’t know where.’ He swallowed hard. Suddenly the happiness he’d felt a minute

> ago slid out under him …. ‘He’s just gone. And I don’t know if he’s coming back,’ he said. (Brenna, *MC* 35-36)

Billy’s experience of abandonment deeply affects him as he witnesses his father, Zak, neglecting and criticising him. Zak’s failure as a father becomes evident through his behaviour, reinforcing stigma and breaking Billy’s spirit. This sense of abandonment is not isolated, as Zak has previously neglected his responsibilities when seeking money for his own needs. During this encounter, Zak speaks negatively about Billy’s condition, leaving Billy questioning whether his father is ashamed of him. Billy reflects, “The words Dad had said echoed in his head. Don’t worry, this baby won’t turn out like Billy. He tasted salt on his lips and blinked as more tears fell. Was Dad ashamed of him? This baby won’t turn out like Billy” (Brenna, *MC* 63). Billy internalises the belief that he is the reason for Zak’s departure and his mother’s abandonment, profoundly affecting him.

Billy grapples with feeling like a deviant body, unwelcome by his father and society at large. He questions his mother about whether she would abandon an unborn baby like him, seeking reassurance and acceptance. Billy’s longing for his father’s love is evident when he states, “... he wanted his dad. More than anything, he wished Dad would come home” (Brenna, *MC* 57). This parallels Vladimir and Estragon’s waiting in *Waiting for Godot*, hoping for a return to normalcy, only to face disappointment.

Billy’s attempt to appear normal only distances him further from reality and hinders his acceptance of his father’s absence. Constant thoughts of his father make him restless, questioning his health and the need for medication. This blame and self-doubt imposed on deviant bodies by able-bodied individuals reflect a societal desire to marginalise disabled individuals, leaving Billy a victim of this segregation despite his young age. Disabled children, emotionally and physically reliant on their parents, are particularly vulnerable. Every choice they make can profoundly impact their lives, yet Zak fails to provide the necessary care, leaving Billy disappointed and unsure how to bring his father back. In his naivety, Billy suggests to Chrysta the idea of a foundation helping sick children, hoping to access assistance in finding his father through the Kid's Hope Foundation. This plea stems from the mental breakdown of a boy battling FASD with limited resources, rejected not only by society but also by his own father.

Being a crip exposes disabled individuals to exploitation, subjecting them to mockery and ridicule in society. Societal norms worsen the situation, especially for those with poor motor skills like Billy. His struggles with shoes become fodder for classmates like Eddie Mundy, who relishes in mocking Billy's mishaps. Eddie serves as a significant barrier, scrutinising every aspect of Billy's behaviour. Despite Billy's efforts to appear socially acceptable, his motor skills hinder his progress. Furthermore, Billy's facial deformity resulting from FASD makes him a target for mockery, drawing attention to his appearance. When registering for a competition, Eddie blocks Billy, intending to exploit his vulnerability:

> "Hey are you gonna register for the register for the contest?" asked Eddie …. "Yeah. What about it?" ... "Well, you'd better hurry. You're late. Give me the five bucks entry fee, and get over to the registration table as fast as you can …." "You heard me, Chinaman. Five bucks, paid to me, before you enter the contest." "I'm not Chinese." Said Billy. Kids often thought he was Chinese because of his eyes, but he wasn't. (Brenna, *MC* 46)

Billy becomes a target of mockery due to his facial deformity, a characteristic often associated with individuals with FASD. The presence of such abnormalities provides an opportunity for others, like Eddie, to exploit and bully Billy, who is defenceless against their actions. Eddie, being an able-bodied individual, enjoys the privilege of mocking Billy and resorts to using derogatory names to describe him.

Billy, seeking yo-yo sponsorship, faces discrimination. Shop owners judge him unfairly, refusing to inquire about his needs and chasing him away. At the sporting goods shop, an offer of help masks dismissal. In the golf shop, he's rudely dismissed under false pretences of closure. Even on the street, he's subjected to teasing and threats, highlighting the devaluation of disabled lives by the able-bodied. Billy's encounters are described as follows: "At the sporting goods shop, a man came out and asked if he needed help, but Billy could tell he really meant, 'Stop hanging around here.' Billy went into the golf shop and was chased out by a woman who said, 'We're closed for carpet cleaning. Can't you read the sign?'" (Brenna, *MC* 51).

Billy constantly faces struggles and insults, which remind him of his mother's admission of responsibility for his current state. This realisation momentarily shakes Billy's world, leaving him yearning to be someone else. His wish to have a normal life is expressed when he says, "'I wish I was somebody else, … he would have said more but he could feel his voice dwindling away until there was nothing left" (Brenna, *MC* 70).

Jane's experience in the novel *Wild Orchid* highlights her constant undermining, particularly following her father's abandonment. Despite possessing a photogenic memory, Jane is unable to escape the pervasive influence of the normate lens. She internalises the notion that when people leave, there is a possibility they may never return, reinforcing the negative self-perception perpetuated by the crip lens.

Jane's obsession with the number seven serves as a coping mechanism, providing her with a sense of comfort and control. Engaging in repetitive actions seven times becomes habitual for her. For instance, when she experiences stress, she walks around a place seven times. Similarly, during a trip to Waskesiu, she circles the car seven times when they stop for gas, using this ritual to soothe herself. Jane describes her actions by stating:

> I have this feeling that the number seven is lucky, and if I do things seven times, I feel safe. Like, I'll take seven sips from my glass instead of one big one, or bounce a ball seven times. Going around the car seven times was a necessary diversion for any anxious feelings. The fact that her words came out in seven was just a lucky event. (Brenna, *WO* 15)

Jane, finding solace in repeating actions seven times due to Asperger's Syndrome, copes with anxiety through this behaviour. However, she faces criticism from able-bodied individuals who perceive it as helplessness or a societal burden. Her unique coping mechanism is misinterpreted and stigmatised by the normate lens, failing to appreciate diverse strategies employed by disabled individuals.

Throughout the novel, Jane faces consistent undermining from her mother, Penelope, who assumes decision-making authority and perceives her as unreliable. Despite Jane's capability, Penelope's perspective fails to recognise her autonomy and sound judgment. Reflecting on her mother's frequent changes in boyfriends, Jane remarks, "The trouble with my mother is that she isn't very good at weighing decisions. She often sees her side. It's a good thing she has me to help her with balance" (Brenna, *WO* 10), revealing Penelope's limited perspective. Additionally, Penelope's prohibition of Jane having a boyfriend is seen as hindering her growth into adulthood, as Jane perceives it as a means to keep her from crossing the line into maturity: "I think my mother does not want me to have a boyfriend because this will mean that I am growing up, and she doesn't want me to cross over the line and be an adult" (Brenna, *WO* 39). These actions not only impede Jane's personal development but also underscore the able-bodied lens through which Penelope judges her daughter's romantic eligibility.

Penelope's failure to understand Jane's needs during their vacation in Waskesiu is evident as she expects Jane to behave properly without considering her discomfort in new situations. Despite Jane's reassurances, Penelope treats her as a child, attempting to control her actions and accusing her of neglecting maternal care. When Jane's room is painted yellow, triggering a meltdown, Penelope takes charge, reflecting her consistent oversight of Jane's needs and failure to recognise her autonomy. Jane's reaction is captured when she exclaims, "'Look at the walls. They're !!&%$%@@@ yellow!' I screamed …" (Brenna, *WO* 21).

Jane's hidden turmoil escapes the notice of her mother, Penelope, who demands her adaptation to new circumstances without providing the solace and encouragement she craves. Jane grapples with anxiety in unfamiliar settings, unaware of the scrutinising eyes around her, poised to judge through their narrow lens of normalcy.

Penelope wields authority over both herself and Jane, assuming a dictatorial stance rather than that of a nurturing mother. She unilaterally makes decisions without consulting Jane, whether it's regarding their trip to Waskesiu or their abrupt departure following her breakup with her boyfriend. Penelope manipulates and imposes her will upon Jane, as evidenced by her casual remarks, "Don't you miss a lot of things about home .... You were very good to come up here ... I hope I haven't been asking too much of you. You know, we could go back early if you like" (Brenna, *WO* 122). Despite the appearance of dialogue, Penelope ultimately dictates the outcome, showcasing her domineering attitude towards Jane. Jane’s discomfort with Penelope’s decisions manifests in meltdowns as she grapples with the sudden upheavals thrust upon her:

> How can she do this to me? Don’t I have any say about anything? She went to sleep after that, but I didn’t. I think I stayed awake all night. Today at work, I was supposed to give what’s called ‘my notice,’ meaning that I would tell them I was leaving at the end of the month. (Brenna, *WO* 124-125)

Penelope’s behaviour disregards Jane’s autonomy, expecting compliance without space for her thoughts. This power dynamic cements Penelope as the decision-maker, leaving Jane feeling powerless. Penelope’s actions dismiss Jane’s experiences and challenges, perpetuating otherness and exclusion. An empathetic approach requires listening, dialogue, and considering Jane’s perspective.

In “Finding Voices” from *Something to Hang on To*, Janine’s connection with her mother feels stifling. Her mother sees her only as disabled, not as family. Janine notices the difference in her mother’s demeanour around others versus alone with her. This drives Janine to foster care, labelled as broken. Her mother’s approach leaves Janine voiceless and shattered.

A notable incident occurs when Janine’s mother takes her out for lunch at school as a birthday treat. However, her mother’s impatience and prejudice towards disabled individuals are evident as she expresses her discomfort, saying, “Let’s just get out of here. Schools always give me creeps ...” (Brenna, *STHOT* 65). This quote exemplifies her mother’s impatience and prejudiced attitudes.

Jane, unlike Janine, refuses to succumb to silence, resisting her mother’s suffocating control over her life. Despite frequent clashes over her education and career choices, Jane sets boundaries and demands autonomy. Yet, her mother's relentless dominance, coupled with societal pressure, instils deep-seated insecurity. Jane foresees an uncertain, bleak future, describing it as "the blackness of The Future," (Brenna, *WO* 131) where societal norms condemn disabled individuals like herself, hindering their potential and leaving them unfulfilled.

During Jane's stay in France, she is plagued by a dream in which her mother continues to assert control over her. The dream leaves her feeling suffocated as her mother incessantly demands things from her. Jane expresses her frustration, stating, "In this dream, though, I kept hearing my mother calling me ... wherever I go, my mother is always demanding that I do this, don't do that, do this, don't do that. In fact, my mother is a pest ... I tried to escape from her by heading deeper and deeper into the woods" (Brenna, *WB* 90-91). This dream serves as a representation of Jane's suffocation and her desperate attempts to break free from this situation.

Contrary to Jane's mother, her father abandons her upon realising her disability. This abandonment is further highlighted on Jane's eighth birthday when her parents invite her classmates to her party, despite her discomfort with crowds and being the centre of attention. During one of Jane's meltdowns, her father worsens the situation by publicly dragging her in front of her classmates. To compound matters, one of the girls labels her as "The freaker." Jane is left dumbfounded as she witnesses her own father opening the door for other children to bully her. In this scenario, Jane's father's abandonment and her mother's assumption of control establish Penelope as the dominant figure, ultimately taking charge of Jane's life (Brenna, *WFNO* 46).

On another occasion, Jane engages in a conversation with Luke about the distinction between animals and human beings, highlighting how verbal outbursts serve as the missing evolutionary link. Jane explains that swearing can be considered a form of response cry, stating, "... swearing can be thought of as a response cry .... As a human being, you have shaped your response cry with language .... So the human response cry may not actually be a flooding of emotion outward, as people suggested when they call it 'letting off steam'" (Brenna, *WFNO* 43-44). Jane, who has autism, possesses an understanding of the human system, yet her meltdowns are constantly scrutinised, while the stress management methods employed by able-bodied individuals are not. Due to her autism, she is constantly monitored and criticised for her behavioural patterns.

Jane's cry for help often leads others to criticise her or, at worst, undermine her abilities. Even before her diagnosis, during her time in elementary school, Jane exhibited symptoms of autism, such as her aversion to physical touch. However, her teacher failed to comprehend Jane's struggles and assigned her cleaning duties instead. This cry for help resulted in her being labelled as a crip, diverting attention away from her mental condition and providing her with less support and understanding:

> When I was in elementary school, before I knew my diagnosis, I used to have meltdowns about being touched, and other kids called me "The Freaker." The worst meltdowns happened in grade five when we were doing square dancing. I did not want my partners touching me …. I would allow it for a little while and then I would yell. Eventually, my teacher let me miss square dancing and asked me to clean out the teachers' supply room …. (Brenna, *WFNO* 46-47)

Within this narrative, Jane's poignant introspection reveals a profound sense of self-pity stemming from a profound lack of understanding and empathy from her social environment. She finds herself in a state of isolation, yearning for individuals who can truly comprehend the magnitude of her internal struggles and the acute crises she regularly endures.

Jane’s encounter with Adelaide in *The White Bicycle* serves as a turning point in her life, providing her with a sense of comfort and belonging. Adelaide, recognising Jane’s artistic talents, takes it upon herself to nurture her skills and help her become a proficient painter. Their bond transcends conventional social barriers, and for the first time, Jane feels seen and appreciated as an individual. However, when Adelaide passes away, a profound emptiness engulfs Jane, as she mourns the loss of one of the few genuine connections she had in her life:

> On Saturday I ride the white bicycle to the market in the Luormarin …. I see an old woman in a butterfly dress. She is spooning olives into a plastic jar. I look at her carefully but it is not Adelaide. I feel wetness on my cheeks and I am crying …. If I look out past the castle grounds I can see the whole village …. I look into the distance but I cannot see Cassis. I cannot see Adelaide’s house, or the garden, or the pool where no little orange fish dart to the surface. (Brenna, *WB* 173-175)

Jane’s distinctive approach to processing and articulating grief diverges from conventional societal expectations, as evidenced by her verbal expressions and emotional meltdowns. It is pertinent to acknowledge that societal norms surrounding grief often accommodate and validate the experiences of able-bodied individuals while overlooking or pathologising alternative expressions exhibited by neurodivergent individuals like Jane.

The novel, *The White Bicycle*, provides a detailed exploration of Jane’s childhood struggles within the school environment. Her autistic traits make it challenging for her to adapt to changes in her routine, with fire drills being one of the most dreaded occurrences. These drills disrupt her ongoing activities and require strict adherence to established protocols:

> The thing I hate most about grade one are fire drills. Now we are having one … we stop following the schedule and when we stop following the schedule, anything can happen. My mother has told me that other thongs in my day won't change just because one thing changes, but I don't believe her. One change can make everything else go wrong. I am standing in the line of kids from my class and I am trying not to cry. (Brenna, *WB* 66-67)

Despite her mother's reassurances that one change cannot affect another, Jane firmly believes that even small alterations can significantly impact her day. Unfortunately, her struggles often go unnoticed by her teachers, leaving her feeling isolated and criticised for her actions, as she fails to blend in with the crowd.

In the novel *The White Bicycle,* Jane opens up about her childhood trauma and her ongoing struggle to fit into society. She perceives herself as default or broken in the eyes of others. Her behaviour is frequently criticised and scrutinised by able-bodied individuals who fail to understand her perspective: "… I carry inside me: images of being a child, and going to school, and the bewilderment of understanding no one, and of being misunderstood …. Things were uneasy for me most of the time in those days" (Brenna 5).

Even Jane's parents fail to recognise the signs of her distress. They argue about her behaviour at school and shift blame onto each other, further exacerbating Jane's feelings of alienation. Jane is forced to listen to her parents' heated exchanges, which only serve to push her further away from her family and the rest of society.

Similarly, Martin Phoenix, another character in *The White Bicycle*, strives to be seen as a normal person within his family. However, during a breakfast gathering, Martin swears at his brother, prompting Alan Phoenix to intervene and threaten him: "'Stop using bad words' …. 'Or I'll take away that Tango and you'll just have to use thought transference'" (Brenna 28). This incident highlights the tendency of society to assert authority over those with disabilities, treating them as dependents and forgetting to treat them as equals.

Disabled individuals are frequently subjected to criticism for their actions or made to feel as if they are constantly under surveillance. Jane experiences this firsthand when she takes a ride into the woods and notices a couple observing her as she passes them repeatedly with her white bicycle. Despite her friendly attempts to engage with these strangers, she can't help but feel that they are confused by her behaviour: "It is possible that they are confused by the way I am carrying the white bicycle back and forth in the forest … perhaps there is ridicule in their gaze." (Brenna, *WB* 41). This gaze triggers Jane's past memories, causing her to believe that, despite her efforts, she will always be perceived as a 'crip' rather than as a whole person: "I feel them looking at me, judging me. *Look at her, there. The Freaker* [sic]. Voices echo from the past, and I wonder if I'll ever stop hearing them" (Brenna, *WB* 41).

Jane also draws a comparison between herself and Luke Phoenix. While Jane repeats kindergarten to work on her social skills despite excelling academically, Luke repeats a grade due to academic struggles. However, Jane is labelled as a 'crip,' while Luke's difficulties are seen as those of a slow learner. Nevertheless, Luke is not subjected to humiliation or limited exposure to society. Disabled individuals are unfairly limited in their integration into society, despite their efforts to be perceived as ‘normal.’

Additionally, Penelope’s dominant influence over her daughter adds to Jane’s challenges. Despite believing she’s aiding Jane, Penelope consistently places her in uncomfortable situations without consent, assuming a controlling role in her life. While dining out in France, Penelope suggests enrolling Jane in cooking classes without her agreement. Even when Jane objects, Penelope persists, convinced her relentless insistence will sway Jane’s decision:

> “Do you offer cooking classes?’ my mother asked the waitress …. “Non,” says the waitress, shaking her head. “Too bad, because my daughter would like to take one,” my mother says. “No, I would not!” I say my voice loud enough to be in the red zone. But sometimes it is as if my mother is stone deaf. “We’ll see,” she says. (Brenna, *WB* 46-47)

Forcing Jane into activities against her will only worsens her sense of being a ‘crip’ and undermines her confidence in decision-making. It intensifies her feelings of inadequacy and leads to meltdowns, as she perceives herself incapable of functioning at the same level as others. Jane’s frustration escalates to a breaking point, manifesting in a meltdown: “The room starts to look white, and I feel hot with my anger.... I do not like to cook. I have never liked to cook. And I am not going to learn to cook French food!” (Brenna, *WB* 47). Despite her inner resistance, she struggles to assert herself outwardly.

While Jane excels academically, her social skills are lacking, as pointed out by her teacher: “‘Very nice reading, Taylor .... ‘I bet you’ve read this book so many times you’ve memorized it!’” (Brenna, *WB* 56). The teacher’s comments only serve to confuse Jane, highlighting her teacher’s inability to effectively communicate with her students. Despite Jane's attempt to showcase her memory skills, her teacher still fixates on her perceived 'crip' qualities:

> She does seem academically ready for school. We'll just keep working on the social part. I'm sure being an only child has been difficult, because she won't have had much practice sharing. And she is quite spoiled… her social skills will develop. We'll keep working on them and each day is a new day …. (Brenna, *WB* 56)

The elementary school staff fail to understand Jane's meltdowns and instead consistently take her to the principal's office after each incident. Unfortunately, her unique skills are overshadowed by her autistic qualities, which the staff members overlook. This failure to recognise her abilities further contributes to her sense of being misunderstood.

Jane often finds herself overwhelmed by fear, which hinders her ability to comprehend things fully. Her mother's overprotectiveness prevents her from developing as an independent individual. Jane struggles to grasp the concept of secrets and perspectives, as she reflects, "It took me a long time to understand about secrets. When I was a kid, I didn't understand the possibility of thinking something that nobody else knew. That's the part of knowing about perspective-talking... When I stop to calculate, I realize that I have spent over fifty percent of my life confused and afraid. I am trying not to let my emotions boss me around ..." (Brenna, *WFNO* 57-58). Jane draws a parallel between herself and Stanley, a character from Harold Pinter's works, who is afraid to take action and obediently follows his landlady's commands. Jane acknowledges that she is tired of constantly feeling fear and being restricted. Her mother limits her capabilities, firmly believing that Jane cannot live independently, and persuades her daughter to conform to her wishes.

Penelope, as an able-bodied individual, holds a position of dominance that enables her to deceive Jane on two occasions. Firstly, when Penelope wishes to be with Danny at Waskesiu, she fabricates a story about having signed a legal contract obliging her to work at Danny's place. Secondly, she lies to Jane about joining Alan Phoenix in France, leading Jane to believe she will accompany them on the trip. In reality, Penelope deceives her daughter to embark on the journey without her. Jane overhears Luke Phoenix discussing this deception with his friend Julian and realises the unfairness of her father and Penelope's actions. Jane shares, "I listen to them while I am running the water for the dishes. 'They asked her to babysit for the summer so she'd want to come to France with Penny,' says Luke Phoenix. It wasn't really fair, and I said they should tell her the truth, but that's what happened" (Brenna, *WB* 153). Upon discovering the truth, Jane feels a deep sense of bitterness as her own mother betrayed her for selfish reasons. She views the summer as meaningless unless Alan Phoenix compensates her for her role as a personal care assistant. The betrayal inflicted upon her leaves her feeling suffocated and betrayed.

Alan Phoenix, despite having a disabled child of his own, resorts to lying to Jane. Both Alan and Jane represent able-bodied individuals who, at times, deceive and manipulate disabled individuals, perhaps unintentionally, while seeking to assert control over their lives. Initially, Alan showed respect for Jane and recognised her artistic abilities, but in the end, he aligns himself with Penelope and deceives for his own reasons. Penelope, who consistently tries to exert some control over her daughter's life, becomes unsettled when she realises that Jane possesses autonomy not just over herself but over her as well. Penelope attempts to initiate a conversation about the issue, but Jane rejects the offer, leading Penelope to feel guilty: "'Lies and deception! You have ruined my resume!' I tell her. 'You have given me a summer with an empty resume, and now I will never get a full-time job, and I will be stuck with you until you die and I am living alone'" (Brenna, *WB* 156).

Jane asserts her autonomy as an adult and demands transparency from her mother, emphasising that Penelope does not hold authoritative sway over her. Recognising her culpability, Penelope acknowledges that her self-centred actions led her to deceive her daughter. While Jane's vulnerability, stemming from societal perceptions of her as a 'crip,' played a role in her mother's deceitful behaviour, she ultimately takes agency and asserts that her autistic traits cannot serve as a tool for controlling her life.

In consonance with the scholarly discourse articulated by Tobin Siebers in *The Disability Studies Reader*, Swain and Cameron elaborate on the notion of 'coming out' for disabled individuals. They delineate it as "a process of redefinition of one's personal identity through rejecting the tyranny of the normate, positive recognition of impairment, and embracing disability as a valid social identity. Having come out, the disabled person no longer regards disability as a reason for self-disgust, or as something to be denied or hidden, but rather as an imposed oppressive social category to be challenged and broken down" (319).

Jane's journey of self-acceptance and empowerment in *The White Bicycle* resonates with the discourse on 'coming out' within disability studies. In defiance of the normative expectations imposed by able-bodied individuals, Jane confronts the control and deceit perpetuated by her mother and others. By refusing to allow her impairment to solely define her, Jane challenges the hegemony of the 'normate' – the prevailing societal standard. Embracing her disability as a legitimate social identity and rejecting the self-revulsion associated with it, Jane asserts her entitlement to acknowledgment and appreciation for her authentic self. Her narrative illustrates the profound impact of ‘coming out,’ as she emancipates herself from the confining confines of imposed categorisation and begins to envisage a future where she can navigate the world on her own terms.

In conclusion, the trilogy novels, *The Moon Children,* and the short story collection, *Something to Hang on To*, offer profound insights into the lives of individuals who exist outside the norms of society, thereby challenging the concept of the normate. Through the diverse experiences of the characters, these works delve into the complexities of navigating a world that often fails to acknowledge and accommodate their unique identities and disabilities. By highlighting the oppressive nature of societal expectations, these narratives shed light on the limitations imposed on individuals deemed ‘different.’ Drawing from the normate theory discussed in disability studies, a deeper understanding of the power dynamics at play emerges as disabled individuals find themselves marginalised and stripped of agency in a society that privileges able-bodied individuals.

However, the characters in these stories defy these limitations, courageously asserting their right to be seen, heard, and valued. They challenge the authority of the normate, embracing their disabilities as valid aspects of their identities. Through this journey of self-acceptance, they find empowerment and contribute to the dismantling of societal barriers. Ultimately, these narratives call for a critical re-evaluation of societal norms, urging the creation of a more inclusive and equitable world that recognises and celebrates the full spectrum of human experiences.