



# Navigating Societal Perceptions: An In-Depth Exploration Of The Narrative Construction Of Wealth And Disability In The Protagonist Of Fish In A Tree

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

wealthy lifestyle through the character Ally Nickerson in the novel "Fish in a Tree" by Lynda Mullaly Hunt. Ally, a dyslexic student, defies societal stereotypes associated with disabilities by embodying resilience and determination. The paper delves into Ally's journey, analyzing how her experiences contribute to breaking down barriers and fostering a positive approach to wealthy lifestyle for individuals with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities have a more difficult existence than normal people. Despite their capabilities, disabled individuals face unique constraints, leading to occasional frustration and unfulfilled aspirations. They become frustrated from time to time because they are unable to live the life they wish. Ignoring them from normalcy makes them feel uncomfortable and dejected, which leads to them becoming isolated. This study shows that social life has a significant impact on the main character's character development, as well as how loved ones may help promote courage and optimism in disabled people's lives. Through this exploration, the research aims to advocate for a more inclusive and understanding societal perspective.

**Keywords:** Socialization, Learning disabilities, Family support, School environment, Peer relationships

## 1. Introduction

Life is a single word with multiple meanings and connotations. It is incredibly valuable to every single person on the planet. Philosophers, scholars, poets, and playwrights have all written extensively about life and its basic elements. Goldsmith states, "Our greatest glory consists not in never falling, but in rising every time we may" (Goldsmith 267). Life is not always easy for humans, as they are bound to confront countless challenges and disappointments along the way. Every unfavorable experience teaches a person an important life lesson and prepares them to be fearless in the future. Individuals with disabilities have a more difficult existence than normal people, they have been humiliated and mistreated by society in a variety of ways for many years. Despite their capabilities, disabled individuals face unique constraints, leading to occasional frustration and unfulfilled aspirations. Ignoring them from normalcy makes them feel uncomfortable and dejected, which leads to them becoming isolated. Every person's life is built on their character. Society has a significant role in the development of character in disabled people in a variety of ways. Family, school, and peer groups all play an important part in shaping young children's personalities so that they can step forward in society without fear or reluctance. Lynda Mullaly Hunt, a prominent women novelist of America. Her novel *Fish in a Tree* ultimately focuses on Disability studies in Children's literature. The primary setting of the novel revolves around a public school and narrate the story of an adolescent named Ally Nickerson with learning disability and trace the struggles and hardships face in society. It also explores how the character convert all the criticisms that are showered upon her into a constructive and transforms everything with empathy, hard work and acceptance.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

People reframe their views on disability through narratives, which improves their coping mechanisms, fosters a sense of wellbeing, and leads to an acceptance of disability as a natural part of life (Traustadottir, 1991; Turnbull et al.,1993). Narratives are a significant tool for observing this meaning-making process and a

valuable source of data for researching how parents develop intricate and individualised understandings of their child's condition and of themselves in connection to it (Landsman, 2000, 2005; Mattingly & Garro, 2000). "[A]lternative ways of looking at the phenomena of educational difficulty based on different sets of assumptions that lead to different explanations, different frames of reference, and different kinds of questions to be addressed" constitute the manner in which Ainscow (1998) introduces the idea of perspectives on disability (1998, p.8). The social views dominate the field of learning challenges in terms of interpretation and understanding. Research is attempting to refocus the conversation on society and disability. The problem lies in the fact that impairments are divided between social oppression and the individual. "Work in this paradigm conceptualises difficulties in learning as arising from deficits in the neurological or psychological make-up of the child, analogous to an illness or medical condition," according to Skidmore (2004, p. 20). Additionally, it illustrates the dominance of professionals and the societal control of disabled individuals. "To what extent should children's learning difficulties be seen as innate within the child, and to what extent should it be seen as the product of traditional forms of schooling?" asks instructor Dyson (1997, p. 152).

The presence of a disabled child in the home can lead to a reformulation of the parent-child role; reflections on the relationship between the parent and the child as well as the larger social and religious worlds; and a reworking of the past, present, and future (Skinner, Bailey, Correa, & Rodriguez, 1999; Raspberry & Skinner, in press).

By reviewing the literature the study emphasize the transformative power of narratives in shaping perceptions of disability. It stresses the importance of looking at disability from a holistic viewpoint that encompasses both individual and social factors, and the importance of fostering inclusive societal perspectives. By linking these elements, the research advocates for a more empathetic and supportive approach towards individuals with disabilities. Ultimately, the goal is to create a society where everyone feels understood and supported, fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance for all.

### **Purpose of the Study**

To recognise the power of family, school, and peer group that acts as the agents of socialisation in uplifting the lives of the central character and how she conquer all the troubles and turmoils into optimism and hope.

## **3. DISCUSSION**

In the work *Fish in a Tree*, Lynda Mullaly Hunt have portrayed the power of family, school, and peer group as a supportive tool in uplifting the lead character. Ally has dyslexia, a learning disability that makes it difficult for her to socialise with others and to cope in her school and surroundings, leading to her demise. Because of her learning limitations. Ally struggle to adjust to their environment at first. Agents of socialization help to mould a person's mindset, concepts, beliefs, and behaviors by providing mental, moral, and physical support.

### **Family as the Cornerstone: Nurturing Traits and Overcoming Challenges**

The first and most important socializing agent is intended to be family. It is an essential component of one's social growth and necessary part of all living things. In general, the family is viewed as the social institution with the biggest impact on society in all countries. It is responsible for the development and well-being of its children. Children will be influenced by the values and morality modelled in their families as they grow up in society. Rowling remarks, "Family is a life jacket in the stormy sea of life" (Rowling 78). Family plays a huge role in providing excellent traits in children such as trust, compassion, honesty, kindness, and so on.

Ally's father is a captain in an army tank unit, while her mother works as a waitress at A. C. Petersen's restaurant in *Fish in a Tree*. Because of her father's job, the family has to move around a lot. As a result, they have to move schools regularly. Ally's father appears to be more concerned about Ally's life during a Skype session with her family. Parents assist both of their children in whatever way they can. Despite the fact that Ally's mother receives regular complaints from her teachers, she remains optimistic that everything will work out in the end. She is well aware of Ally's skills and constantly encourages her to change her demeanor. Despite her own pain, she praises Ally's artwork, ingenuity, and compassion. Mother is overjoyed to see daughter meeting new acquaintances. Ally runs into the restaurant after winning the class president election and recounts the events of the day. Her mother is taken aback and sheds tears of joy as she embraces her. When she learns that her daughter has been elected class president, she rejoices. Above all, after learning that Ally has dyslexia, her mother fully supports her in her extra lessons with Mr. Daniels, and she notices a gradual improvement in her grades.

Learning disabilities are a sort of neurological disorder that is related to epilepsy. Learning disabled children are as intellectual as their peers, and some are highly gifted. Reading, writing, thinking, recalling, maintaining social interactions, and organising knowledge may be difficult for them. Learning impairment is not curable or remediable. It is a lifetime problem. Ally's older brother is Travis. The same as Ally, Travis is dyslexic but found only at the end of his high school. He is obsessed with collecting coins. Whenever he visits pawn stores to buy coins, he takes Ally with him frequently, tries to teach her new things to strengthen her spirits, "When people have low expectations of you, you can sometimes use it to your advantage . . . As long as you don't have low expectations of yourself. You hear?" (Hunt 34). Despite the fact that Ally finds it difficult to maintain social relationships, she obeys her brother's teachings and

works hard to overcome them. Supporting their strengths, acknowledging their inadequacies, understanding their educational system, cooperating with specialists, and learning about specialized approaches for coping with certain obstacles are all ways that families may help their children with different types of learning disorders. Ally's family stick by her in the face of adversity and tragedy in every manner possible. They are constantly there to console, support, guide, and encourage her, and they are fully invested in her success.

### **Fostering Growth: The Role of School in Socialization and Empowering Students with Learning Disabilities**

The second most important agent of socialisation is school. The formation of an individual's social self is aided by school. Though the initial stage in teaching language is through the home, education is critical in determining how a child interacts with others. It is the role of schools to formalise this process. According to studies, school socialisation for impaired students is a system in which social structure is transmitted through language, observation, inquiry, experiences, instruction, and contact. The research study demonstrates all of the possible strategies for a school to socialise disadvantaged students in this area. As a result, teachers' attitudes and actions have a considerable impact on the educational development of children with disabilities. The importance of the instructor in socialisation education for kids cannot be overstated. They serve a variety of purposes in moulding children's personalities and are critical in creating a positive school climate. A teacher aids in the dissemination of knowledge, the instillation of values, and the demonstration of appropriate behaviour.

In *Fish in a Tree*, Ally Nickerson misbehaves at school to hide her reading and writing challenges. Because her father is in the army, she has moved from school to school, which has helped her keep her secret hidden. Ally has been labelled as foolish, dumb, disrespectful, and lazy by several teachers. Early diagnosis of learning difficulties is critical for a student's long-term success. Similarly, when Mr. Daniels, Ally's new instructor, tries to analyse and forecast Ally's distractions, everything changes.

He inquires,

Do you know what it means to think outside the box? I shake my head. It Means that you are a creative thinker. You think differently than other People. Great. Just once, I want to be told I'm like everyone else. It's a Good thing to be an out-of-the-box thinker. People like that are world- Changers. (Hunt 129)

Mr. Daniels recognises Ally's talent and imagination, adapting his lessons to accommodate her dyslexia and supporting her in realising her special abilities.

Ally has struggled to sustain social contacts with her peers until recently, but she has gained confidence and has formed relationships with them, as well as friendships with Keisha and Albert. As a result of her after-school meetings with Mr. Daniels, who teaches her utilising visual learning techniques, Ally's reading abilities progressively improve. When Ally is elected class president and defeats Shay in the election, her personality blossoms even more. Despite the fact that Shay teases Ally more after her victory, Ally ignores all of Shay's dramas, realising that they are the outcome of her issues.

Mr. Daniels believes, "Everyone is smart in different ways. But if you judge a fish on its ability to climb a tree, it will spend its whole life thinking it's stupid" (Hunt 159). He notices Ally's many different talents, such as her ability to be creative, her mathematics skills, and her ability to solve difficult problems. He shows Ally how she might have developed these abilities as a result of her impairment and explains how she analyses the surroundings in a unique way and comes up with new ideas that the average person would miss. Mr. Daniels also honours Ally's dedication to her academics by presenting her with the Student of the Month award. He challenges pupils to see the world in fresh and fascinating ways. He talks about a long list of great people who suffered from learning disabilities that includes Graham Bell, Thomas Edison, Winston Churchill, Henry Ford, Walt Disney, and Albert Einstein, and motivates Ally by saying that disability is not at all a deal before success and points out the adage, "Great minds don't think alike" (Hunt 274). Ally expresses her gratitude to Mr. Daniels for believing in her and supporting her without expecting anything in return. A school, according to Brubacher, is an active, and formal teaching and socialisation agency. A school is a location where youngsters have several opportunities to gain self-confidence and learn new skills.

### **Peer Power: Nurturing Social Development and Resilience in Children with Disabilities through Friendships**

The next agent of socialisation is the peer group, which has a significant impact on children's psychological and social development. Children with disabilities are not the same as children who are normally able-bodied. They demand special attention and treatment, especially while being socialised by a third party. Peer groups and friends, in addition to family and school, have a significant impact on the socialisation approach. When impaired children are maintained in an inclusive environment, most normal children try to ignore them and exclude them from their group. Such friendships, on the other hand, are impossible to form when children with disabilities are socially rejected by their peers. Friendships aid personal and social development in children and teenagers. As quoted by Hicks, "Always surround yourself with people who lift you up, rather than hold you down" (Hicks 45). They learn to control their emotions and can relate other people's thoughts to their own. Friendships with impaired children also assist normal youngsters in coping with life and being sensitive.

Peer groups define and motivate disabled people to be nice and trustworthy, allowing them to have a better future. Ally's confidence grows as she meets new friends Albert and Keisha, and she feels like a free, self-reliant

young lady. Ally gets bullied by Shay, but Keisha and Albert stand up for her. When Mr. Daniels tells the class about famous inventors and scientists like Henry Ford and Albert Einstein, he mentions that they all had dyslexia. Shay approaches Ally and makes a snide remark about her dyslexia, but Keisha defends her. She develops power and decides to set the globe on fire with her friends, and the world begins to open up with new possibilities. As the class president, Keisha and Albert are Ally's most ardent supporters. More importantly, anytime Ally has a low self-esteem problem, Keisha encourages her to be proud of her individuality and the areas in which she excels. Friendship is an excellent source of compassion and understanding in interpersonal relationships. Those who have friends they can rely on and who wish to be with them for the rest of their lives are fortunate. Friendship is vital in life because it teaches us life lessons that we will never forget. Some crucial lessons that will change a person's life.

### Understanding the Complexities of Personality and Identity

The study of human personality is a difficult task. Every person has their own distinct personality. Personality refers to the variances in how people think, feel, and respond. People have differing opinions not only about their physical attributes, but also about their mental and behavioural traits. Personality refers to the organised arrangement of a person's attributes, beliefs, feelings, behaviour, and coping methods. The personality of an individual determines how they adapt to their surroundings. It can be investigated through one's thoughts, feelings, opinions, and values. As a result of numerous life situations, personality changes may still occur. For instance, the person who has been through a traumatic or tragic incident might alter their personality. According to Hurlock, Internal and external variables are the two factors that determine personality. The internal element influences a person's internal growth and can be seen in their behaviour as they read and learn new topics. Anything that happens outside and beyond the individual, such as how other people behave and perceive them, is considered the external component.

Ally despises going to school in *Fish in a Tree*. She's always up to trouble, and the assignment is simply too difficult for her. She cannot get the letters and sentences in her head to quit dancing around in her head when she tries to read or write. Her professors are perplexed, and the bullies mock her. Ally fights her learning disability, but she does not want it to be the first thing people remember about her. Ally struggles with her self-esteem throughout the narrative and finally achieves it when she overcomes her impairment. Ally is very courteous and friendly. Even though she continuously upsets Shay, she wants to reconcile with her. The search for identity is one of the novel's main themes. Because of her incapacity to read, Ally has come to believe that she is out of place and hopeless. Her perseverance and hard work, on the other hand, progressively push her up and help her reclaim her identity.

## 4. CONCLUSION

When disabled persons are discriminated against by society, they react in a variety of ways. Some people pretend to bear all of the agony and endure it with patience, while others fight back. Lynda Mullaly Hunt show the reality of disability struggles, emphasising the importance of family, friends, and instructors in guiding children to lead a wealthy lives. "A tulip doesn't strive to impress anyone," writes author Williamson. It makes no attempt to distinguish itself from a rose. It isn't required. It's a unique situation. And every flower has its own place in the garden. You did not have to work hard to make your face stand out from everyone else's on the planet. It is what it is. You are one-of-a-kind because you were made that way." People with disabilities should be recognised and acknowledged because they want the same opportunities as everyone else and to be treated fairly. They are a sign of hope and optimism. Those individuals should be praised and supported in order to foster positive characteristics. Even though they have been through a lot in life as a result of their differences, most of them rise from the ashes with positivity and hope.

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