

Finding Order in Disability in Mark Haddon's "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time".

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Abstract

The human mind is one of the most complex organs in defining humanity. It is the mind that not only shapes human behavior but also shapes society as a whole. When the mind works differently from the usual, the behavior and demeanor of the human changes. Though the world views it as disorder, people with such disorders too have order in their life. Disability studies in literature paves the way for us to understand the order in the lives of the disordered. This paper focuses on analyzing the protagonist Christopher's behaviour and demeanor from the novel "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" by Mark Haddon. The main aim of the study is to unravel and figure out how the mind of Christopher works. He has a developmental disorder called Asperger's syndrome, where people have difficulties to connect with others socially. Their thinking patterns and demeanor are rigid and repetitive. Mark Haddon's narrative skillfully navigates through Christopher's mind and behaviour and helps us expand the limited knowledge that we have towards Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and what living with the condition entails. This novel stands as an exceptional chance to overcome the wrong assumptions and stigmas one has towards autism.

Keywords

Mark Haddon, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, Autism, Disability Studies, Asperger's Syndrome, Behavioural Studies.

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Literature, as an art form, encompasses a wealth of words that expresses the human experience. It serves as a window into diverse cultures and individual perspectives, offering insight, empathy, and understanding of the world in which we live, which includes people of various functionalities. When discussing the meaning of various functionalities in reference to disabled people, it's important to approach the topic with sensitivity and respect. Each individual's experience and perspective on disability can vary widely, so it's crucial to prioritize their voices and preferences. It is essential to recognize that disability is not always defined by limitations, but rather as a part of the diversity of human experience. When referring to functionalities, it's crucial to use language that doesn't reinforce negative stereotypes or stigmas surrounding disability. In terms of cognitive functionalities, it's vital to recognize the diverse ways in which people process information, communicate, and engage with the world. Autism is considered as a disability but depends on how it impacts an individual's daily functioning. It is also associated with unique strength and abilities like attention to detail, pattern. Disability theory looks at disability as a social and cultural construct rather than simply a medical condition.

One of the most prominent writers who proposed disability theory is Rosemarie Garland Thomson. In her influential work, she argues that disability is a natural part of the human experience and challenges the traditional medical model of disability that focuses solely on the individual's impairment. Another important figure in disability theory is Lennard J.

Davis. He has written extensively on the cultural construction of disability and the social implications of disability. Davis's work explores how disability is represented in literature, media, and popular culture, and how these representations impact the lived experiences of people with disabilities.

These writers, among others, have contributed to the development of disability theory by challenging traditional notions of disability, promoting a more inclusive and accessible society for people with disabilities. Their work has been instrumental in shifting the conversation around disability from a focus on individual deficits to a broader consideration of societal attitudes, discrimination, and barriers.

The literature in disability studies encompasses a wide range of topics, including disability rights, representations of disability in media and literature, disability and identity, and the intersectionality of disability with other social categories such as race, gender, and sexuality. This body of work is crucial for understanding the lived experiences of disabled individuals and

challenging societal norms and structures that perpetuate ableism and marginalize people with disabilities. Several contemporary authors have explored themes of disability in their work, creating narratives that provide nuanced and empathetic portrayals of characters with diverse abilities. Jodi Picoult, a prolific American is known for incorporating thought-provoking themes, including disability, into her novels. Works such as *House Rules* which delves into the story of a young man with Asperger's syndrome who becomes a mur-

der suspect, showcase Picoult's ability to sensitively portray characters with disabilities within complex and emotionally resonant narratives. British author Jojo Moyes has written impactful novels that touch on themes of disability and its intersection with love and personal growth. Her best-selling novel *Me Before You* sensitively addresses the complexities of life and love in the context of quadriplegia, prompting readers to contemplate profound ethical and emotional questions.

Their works stand alongside those of Mark Haddon in enriching the literary landscape with diverse and compelling representations of disability. Mark Haddon is a renowned British novelist, poet, and children's book author, best known for his award-winning novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003). Before becoming a full-time writer, Haddon held various odd jobs, including working with disabled people and writing and illustrating educational materials.

Haddon's literary career took off with the publication of his first novel, *It*, which tells the story of Christopher Boone, a boy of fifteen with a form of autism, who is determined to solve the mystery of a murdered dog. This book received widespread acclaim for its portrayal of Christopher's unique perspective and its empathetic exploration of neurodiversity. It won several awards, including the Whitbread Book of the Year and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book. In addition to his novels, Haddon has written and illustrated numerous children's books. His works often explore themes of imagination, friendship, and the challenges of growing up. Some of his notable children's books include *The Red House* (2012), *Boom!* (2009). Haddon's writing style is characterized by its poignant simplicity and keen observational skills. He has a knack for capturing the inner worlds of his characters with honesty and humor, making his work both compelling and accessible to a wide audience.

In the novel, Christopher's unique perspective and way of processing the world around him drives the narrative, offering readers insight into the challenges and triumphs of living with a neurodevelopmental disability. The novel explores how Christopher's autism impacts his daily life, interactions with others, and his ability to navigate the world. Christopher's exceptional memory, affinity for math, and struggle with sensory overload are emphasized throughout the story. His difficulty understanding social cues, interpreting emotions, and coping with change are also central themes, shedding light on the experiences of individuals on the autism spectrum. Christopher's relationship with his family, particularly his father, and his quest to solve the mystery of a neighborhood dog's death are key elements of the novel. The story delves into the complexities of family dynamics and the challenges of raising a child with autism, highlighting the need for empathy, understanding, and support.

Through Christopher's journey, the novel challenges stereotypes and misconceptions about individuals with autism, offering a compassionate portrayal of his inner world and the importance of embracing neurodiversity. It provides a platform for discussing the unique strengths and obstacles faced

by people with autism, while also addressing the broader theme of acceptance and inclusion in society. Examination of Christopher's behavioural patterns can give us a better picture of his behavior. His life is full of order unlike the society's perception that he is disordered. His mind works differently which causes changes in his behavior and demeanor. Imagine a parallel world in which everyone has Asperger's Syndrome. In that world, the term 'abnormal' would likely be applied to the 'normal' population in the current world. So understanding them is better than judging them.

Christopher is highly specific of order in his life. He considers things being in nice order, as logical. Having things in order makes him feel safe. He has his personal preference of order. He loves the colour red and detests Yellow and brown. He avoids touching anything that is Yellow and Brown. One of his favourite foods is Gobi Aloo Sag, he adds red food color in it to make him assured. He puts himself before anyone, as he finds it hard to adjust and gives priority to his own wishes. While it is a choice for others, it is indispensable to him. He calls it a good day when he sees Red cars and bad day when he sees yellow cars. He compares this with other people saying it is a good day for them when the weather is sunny, and gloomy when it rains. He thinks prime numbers are like life because when all the patterns are taken away it remains, still

logical. He numbers the chapters of his book in prime numbers rather than cardinal numbers. It has 233 chapters, but if numbered as we usually do, it contains 51 chapters. This is what makes Christopher different from the madding crowd. Maybe he sees himself as a prime number. He finds order in everything, even when he becomes aware of his mother's death, he finds comfort

when Mrs. Shears makes things tidy like arranging kitchen jars, making the labels face outwards and placing knives in their right compartments.

Christopher doesn't do what he's told to do because he finds it confusing. When people tell him what to do, for instance, if people tell him to 'keep quiet' he wonders for how long he should do so. He finds the instructions incomplete and hence doesn't follow them. Siobhan, his teacher is the only one who truly understands him. She precisely informs him what he should and shouldn't do.

"She once said, 'If you want to go on the swings and there are already people on the swings, you must never push them off. You must ask them if you can have a go. And then you must wait until they have finished'." (Haddon 39)

If instructions have such clarity then he will follow them without question. The world may find his behavior and demeanor rude but he has his reasons. Only when the world understands why, it'll be easy to work with people who are like Christopher.

Christopher doesn't show emotions through reactions because it is not easy for him to do. He finds feelings as a picture and tries to mimic it. His relationship is based on truth, trust and how much he feels safe with them. He loves truth, rather than decorated lies. He doesn't like metaphors. He finds peo-

ple confusing, when they say someone as 'Apple of my eye' he literally imagines apples in eyes. Lies are not acceptable to him because they're not facts. He does not tell lies because he's unable to come up with a lie. Lies make him feel shaky and scared, like he feels when he stands on the top of a tall building.

He doesn't like proper fiction novels because everything in there is false. He prefers detective novels where logic and reasoning are involved. He values truth a lot. When he finds out that his father killed Wellington and his mother was alive, he couldn't stand the fact that his father lied to him, more than the emotion he should have felt knowing his mother was alive. He feels so unsafe and frightened. The room spins around him and he gets sick.

"I had to get out of the house. Father had murdered Wellington. That meant he could murder me, because I couldn't trust him, even though he had said, 'Trust me', because he had told a lie about a big thing." (Haddon 153).

When his trust in his father shatters, Christopher does something he has never done before, he leaves his ordered life and travels alone in chaos to reach his mom, a safe place.

His emotions are always detached. When he believes his mom is dead and suddenly discovers that she is alive he is not emotionally stirred, he only gets upset with the lie part. He doesn't even let her hug him, which he calls 'grabbing'. He can't read emotions and relates it to expressions he studied, to know the feeling. He finds his father sad once and leaves him alone thinking he would prefer that, like him. But it makes him look like an unbothered, emotionally detached child. We find no sad emotion in him when he narrates the death of his family members to the police. When he hears his mom is unwell, he says he'll prepare a 'Get well Soon' card. He puts nine red cars in the card, only those who truly know Christopher will know that this is the love he shows for his mother by wishing her a 'super good day'. Others will think that he is an ungrateful, emotionless boy. He is into logics than into emotion, he was not emotionally bothered that his mother died, but trying to find out and explains whether she died of heart attack or aneurysm or embolism. People consider him a human only when he cries out of grief, but Christopher doesn't know to show emotions at will. He cares for his mom by trying to find how she died. He misses his mom in his own way, he doesn't believe in heaven so he logically calculates molecules of his cremated mother will be floating in clouds or come down as rain.

Christopher's behavioural issues are explained in chapter 73. This makes us understand his persona. He doesn't like being touched so he hits anyone who violates his boundaries. He groans when he feels that too much information is coming from the outside world. He feels safe when he groans. He doesn't like when someone moves furniture disrupting his order. He finds eye contact uncomfortable because others try to read his thoughts, even though he can't do the same. He feels as if he is like a one-way mirror.

Christopher compares his mind to a machine. When asked

too many questions too quickly, it gets jammed. His mind is at peace when he sees things in order. He feels good in the police cell because it is a perfect cube. He calls himself observant, not clever. He doesn't like strangers or new places or anything without prior information.

"I like timetables because I like to know when everything is going to happen." (Haddon 192).

When he's in London, a new place to him, he gets frightened by seeing too many signs and his brain stops working. This is because he literally sees every sign out there, as a cluster of letters. He sees everything without missing details. He always compares others to himself. For example, if one goes to the countryside, others would see a village in the distance, but he would see that the village has thirty one visible houses and a church with a square tower.

Truly, his mind works differently from others. His behaviour would be judged if the reasons are not known for his actions. This novel of Mark Haddon makes people understand the reasons behind such behaviours. It can be prescribed as a handbook for beginners to discover the lives of individuals with different ways of seeing and experiencing the world. Prospects of future research can include a study on Empathy of people towards Christopher, Christopher's quest for independence and identity.

Beyond his literary achievements, Mark Haddon's influence extends to raising awareness and understanding of neurodiversity through his writing. By depicting characters like Christopher Boone with empathy and respect, he has contributed to a greater understanding of individuals with different ways of seeing and experiencing the world. Surely, it will continue to captivate readers and inspire a deeper appreciation for the richness of human experience.

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