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CHARACTERS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM IN YOUNG ADULT INCLUSION
LITERATURE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze disability portrayals in 14 young adult literature (YAL) novels featuring characters with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) according to the elements of characterization, plot, and theme. Results revealed that characters were frequently portrayed as competent, multidimensional, and neither as a hero nor a victim. Characters with ASD commonly spoke for themselves through a first-person perspective and were generally portrayed in an accurate manner facing conflicts similar to same-age peers. Plots focused on what the character could do, however, some plot events seemed contrived rather than realistic, with the climax and resolution often focusing on the character's disability. Social acceptance and the desire for friendship was a common theme throughout many of the books. Recommendations for using YAL in the classroom to teach about students with ASD are provided.

Introduction

Young Adult Literature (YAL) attracts a wide-readership. In 2013, more than half of YAL were bought by adults 18 years of age or older (Feeney, 2013). Avid followers of *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *The Hunger Games* attest to the potential worldwide appeal and increasing popularity of YAL. In 2009, adult hardcover sales were down 17.8%, while young adult hardcover sales rose by 30.7% (Carpenter, 2010). Carpenter further stated that despite a decrease in general book sales, young adult books held strong. Although the readership of YAL extends beyond a teenage audience, the majority of content and themes target adolescents. Adolescents not only learn about the world and life through books (Miller, 2012), but also search for themselves within the texts they read. These young adults form identities and look to books that speak to them and guide them through a pivotal developmental stage (Letcher, 2013).

Literature about disabilities, or “inclusion literature” (Andrews, 1998, p. 420), should allow young readers to progress from awareness to understanding, empathy, and eventual acceptance of diversity (Prater, Dyches & Johnston, 2006). Teachers may use young adult inclusion literature to educate students by selecting books, reading with their classes, and facilitating discussions that promote empathy and acceptance (Miller, 2012). Inclusion literature helps adolescents “learn about, understand, and relate to people with disabilities” (Wopperer, 2011, p. 26), as it features young people with disabilities struggling through recognizable adolescent challenges.

The presence of characters with disabilities in YAL has become more common, heralding a vibrant area of study. Over the years, the portrayal of persons with disabilities in literature has evolved. In the past, many stories portrayed characters with disabilities as pale, fragile, deformed, or miraculously cured (Wopperer, 2011). Characters with disabilities became

synonymous with the sinister and mal-intentioned (e.g., Captain Ahab, Long John Silver, Dr. Strangelove; Nelson, 1994). As individuals with disabilities became more visible in our schools and communities, characters with disabilities began to be portrayed in a more realistic and empowering light, commanding central roles in works of literature (Wopperer, 2011). Several authors discussed the portrayal of disability and diversity in YAL (Dyches & Prater, 2000; Landrum, 2001; Miller 2012; Umerlik, 1992). These authors' suggestions for evaluating the quality of inclusion literature included examining characterization, setting, plot, point of view, theme, style, and accuracy of portrayal. These elements have been analyzed in YAL featuring various disabilities such as learning disabilities (Prater, 2003), visual impairments (Carroll & Rosenblum, 2000), communication disorders (Sotto & Ball, 2006), and developmental disabilities (Dyches, Prater & Leininger, 2009; Mills, 2002). The present article will address inclusion literature featuring characters with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

Recently, ASD has been in the public eye. Documentaries, news reports, parenting guides and parent autobiographies fill bookshelves, the internet, and our airwaves. There are more children with ASD in schools and classrooms than ever before. The prevalence of ASD increased dramatically in the past decade to roughly 1 in 68 children (CDC, 2014). Boys are identified almost 5 times more than girls, with one in 42 boys compared to one in 189 girls (CDC, 2014). Much of the increase in the number of individuals with ASD has been in those with average to above average intelligence. Until recently, approximately 70% of individuals with autism were also diagnosed with an intellectual disability. Today, ASD is more broadly defined and only about 50% of children with ASD have an IQ score in the range of intellectual disability (Dawson, Soulieres, Gernsbacher, & Mottron, 2007; Eveleth, 2011; Soulières, Dawson, Gernsbacher, & Mottron, 2011; Volkmar, Lord, Bailey, Schultz, & Klin, 2004).

Children and youth with ASD qualify for special education services if they meet the IDEA 2004 definition as follows:

A developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities, stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences (<http://idea.ed.gov>).

There is a wide range of functioning levels, interests, talents, and challenges among the population of children and youth with ASD. We commonly see characters with high-functioning autism (HFA) and those with Asperger's syndrome (AS) in movies and novels, while individuals with more severe symptoms and behaviors appear more frequently in documentaries. Therefore, stories told through movies and novels may not be representing the full range of strengths and weaknesses of those on the autism spectrum. Understanding the needs and challenges of all individuals with ASD is necessary to promote their integration into our schools and communities.

Purpose. The purpose of the study was to analyze fourteen award-winning young adult literature books that had a main character with ASD. We examined how the portrayal of a character with autism (CWA) influenced the plot and theme of each book. Accuracy of portrayal and the explicit and implicit messages sent are crucial to examine, as young people draw information from various sources from movies to literature to construct their understanding of autism.

Method

Selection Criteria

The books selected for review were based on three criteria. First, the book needed to have the designation of Young Adult Literature (YAL) defined as a piece written, published, and marketed to adolescents and young adults. The American Library Association (Young Adult Library Services Association, YALSA, n.d.) further defined a young adult as someone between the ages of twelve and eighteen. Second, we required that the book feature an adolescent main character that either had an ASD or was a family member of someone with ASD. Third, the book needed to be a national award winner. Recommended reading lists for teachers and students are commonly compiled from awards lists, and therefore the most probable books introduced to young adult readers.

We began the selection process by searching award lists published by divisions of the ALA. The search included YALSA's list of *Best Books for Young Adults* from 1998 to 2013. We then examined *Schneider Family Book Award* recipients. The *Schneider Family Book Award* is given annually "to recognize and honor authors and illustrators for their distinguished portrayal of people living with a disabling condition" (American Library Association, n. d.). Only books in the teen category were included in our selection. Winners of the Biennial *Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award* (Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities of the Council for Exceptional Children, n. d.) were also considered. Annotated bibliographies were then reviewed (ALA, *Bibliography of Children's Books about the Disability Experience*; Prater & Dyches, 2008a; Rosenblum, & Carroll, 2000; Ward, 2002), along with Wikipedia's list of fictional characters on the autism spectrum. Fourteen books met the selection criteria and are included in our analysis. (See Table 1. Books Included in Analysis)

Insert Table 1 approximately here

Evaluation

Several studies provided guidelines for evaluating inclusion literature (Landrum, 2001; Prater, Dyches & Johnstun, 2006; Rosenblum, & Carroll, 2000). Landrum (2001) created criteria by first outlining “vital traits of good intermediate literature” (p. 252) which included elements of plot, character, and tone. Plot elements included realistic rather than contrived events; focus on what the character could do without making him/her into a relative superhero; the character faced conflicts similar to those of his/her peer group; the climax and ending did not focus on the disability; a cure for the disability was not the solution to the character’s problems or conflicts; and although the book was fiction, descriptions of the disability were accurate. Dyches and Prater (2000) suggested analyzing theme, characterization, setting, plot, point of view, and literary style. They stated that quality inclusion literature included credible characters who were multidimensional, and ever growing; quality plots contained clearly defined conflicts upon which dramatic tension is built, with a resolution that included the character being able to solve problems without relying extensively on adults. Rosenblum and Carroll (2000) suggested analyzing YAL according to whether events were realistic, descriptions of the character were accurate, the character with a disability to promote the growth of a nondisabled character, and the disability should neither be romanticized nor promote stereotypes.

Relying on the recommendations of these authors, we created a checklist for evaluation. The checklist included elements of characterization, plot, and theme. Elements of characterization included whether the characters with autism were portrayed as competent, socially accepted, multi-dimensional, and their disability accurately portrayed. Plots were analyzed for realism, conflicts similar to those experienced by same age peers, and whether the

climax and resolution focused on the disability. We also identified recurring themes within the 14 novels selected.

Guidelines for analysis are in Table 2. Criteria for Analysis. See Table 3, for a brief synopsis of novels analyzed.

Insert Table 2 approximately here

Insert Table 3 approximately here

Results

Characterization

Perspective. Eight of 14 stories (*Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, *Wild Orchid* and *Waiting for No One*, *London Eye Mystery*, *Anything But Typical*, *Marcelo in the Real World*, *Mockingbird*, and *Colin Fisher*) were written from the first person perspective of a character on the autism spectrum (which will be referred to as character(s) with autism, or CWA). Four of 14 books were written from the point of view of a sibling of a CWA. In the *Al Capone* series, Natalie, who has autism, was a supporting character to Moose, her brother and main character. In *Rules*, the book was told from the perspective of Catherine, sister to David who has autism. One book, *Haze*, was told in third person, but articulated the perspective of the CWA. Finally, *Running on Dreams* featured alternating chapters from the point of view of the CWA and the non-disabled *peer aide* assigned to him. Sections from the CWA are in first person; those from the peer aide are in third person.

Speaking for self. Utilizing the point of view of the character with a disability allowed the character to speak for him/herself. In 11 of 14 books, the CWA spoke for him/herself. The three books where the character did not speak for him/herself were *sibling books*. *Rules*, featured two main characters with disabilities whose stories were told through the point of view of

Catherine. Catherine created rule cards for her brother to teach him socially acceptable behavior. Catherine's friend Jason had a physical disability. Because Jason's therapist routinely disregarded his ability to speak for himself, Catherine illustrated communication cards that gave Jason *voice*.

Natalie (a character with undiagnosed autism, because the story took place in the 1930s when little was understood about autism) did not speak for herself in two of the three *Al Capone* books. In the first book, Natalie expressed basic wants such as lemon cake, going swimming, and seeing Inmate 105. However, she primarily tagged along with her brother who spoke for her. Natalie neither made decisions nor expressed opinions and thoughts. In the second book, Natalie's voice emerged slightly when she repeated a phrase "zero guns," that foiled the inmates' escape attempt. We categorized the third book as Natalie speaking for herself because she was able to speak clearly and express herself to gain entry to the hospital to see her father.

Competence. Eight of the 14 books featured a competent CWA with both strengths and weaknesses; strengths clearly outweighing weaknesses (*Curious Incident, Haze, Wild Orchid, Waiting for No One, Running on Dreams, Anything But Typical, Marcelo in the Real World, and Colin Fischer*). These books showed the benefit of the characters' attention to detail and analytical thinking, gifts for numbers and computers, intense focus on religion and morals, and finding a job that matched the need for organization and routine. Weaknesses portrayed included the CWA having meltdowns, being sensitive to touch and sound, rigidly adhering to rituals and routines, and literal thinking.

Three books included characters that were somewhat competent. In *London Eye Mystery*, Ted, the CWA, was portrayed as competent in the sense that he was able to figure out the mystery of his cousin Salim's disappearance and saved him. However, he still relied heavily on

his sister to communicate for him. In *Mockingbird*, Caitlin depended heavily on her counselor and her father, who was grieving and recovering from loss of his wife and son. In *Al Capone Does My Homework*, Natalie still depended on her brother, but when an occasion arose where she had to stand on her own, she did so.

Three books portrayed characters who we designated not competent. All three were told from the perspective of the CWA's sibling. In *Rules*, David was portrayed as incompetent relying on Catherine to tell him rules of behavior acceptable in public. In *Al Capone Does My Shirts* and later in *Al Capone Shines My Shoes*, Natalie could not be trusted on her own. Her brother, Moose, looked after her and helped her do everything from protecting her button collection to making sure she was properly clothed to go swimming.

Accepted or Rejected. In two books, the characters were isolated and rejected due to their disability. In *Mockingbird*, Caitlin, the CWA, experienced difficulties finding friends. Though she eventually successfully befriended Michael, who was 6, those in her own age group rejected her. In *Anything But Typical*, Jason had one classmate who was nice to him. However, he was largely rejected by other students. Although Jason became friends with a girl he met online, at the end of the story, she rejected him as a romantic prospect.

Eight of the fourteen books, described acts of bullying or teasing. In *Anything But Typical* Jason got into an argument when a classmate sat at *his* computer. David, in *Rules* had an incident at the bus stop. Colin (of *Colin Fischer*) had his head dunked in a toilet by a bully. When Caitlin, of *Mockingbird*, tried to befriend the popular girls, they called her *different* and *special*. Taylor in *Wild Orchid* and *Waiting for No One* recollected a traumatic experience from her younger years when everyone called her *Lion King* because of her lunch bag and *The Freaker* for her tantrums. Seb, in *Haze*, was incessantly bullied by three classmates which escalated to Seb being beaten

up. In *Running on Dreams*, Justin's peer aide, Brad, defended him against the school bully.

In three of the books, the CWA was portrayed as partially accepted/partially rejected. In *Al Capone Does My Homework*, the families blamed Natalie for a fire that destroyed a residence block on Alcatraz. Though Moose's friends accepted Natalie, a guard had strong feelings against her, and she was not accepted outside of Moose's circle of friends. In *Rules*, David's family accepted him (although Catherine sometimes felt embarrassed), but rejected by peers. Finally, in *Marcelo in the Real World*, Marcelo may have made a friend at his father's law firm where he worked, but also had to contend with the law partner's son who was condescending and manipulative towards him.

In two books, the CWA was neither accepted nor rejected. In *Curious Incident*, Christopher went to a special school where he interacted more with his teacher than with peers. He also did not interact with people in his community. Though not bullied, during his train ride, he experienced looks and comments of disgust/intolerance. In the *London Eye Mystery*, there was no indication of Ted being actively rejected, however he stated that he had five friends – his mother, father, sister, teacher, and as a result of the adventure, his cousin. This indicated Ted was not well accepted at school or in the neighborhood.

Multi-Dimensional. Eleven characters were featured in the 14 books (Taylor was in two books, *Wild Orchid* and *Waiting for No One*; Natalie was in all three *Al Capone* books). Eight of 11 CWA were portrayed in a multidimensional manner (showed evidence of character growth and change throughout the story). In the three *Al Capone* books, Natalie was portrayed as moderately changing through each book. In the last book of the series, Natalie wanted to see her father at the hospital. She overcame her discomfort of looking people in the eye; and by passing the nurse station without a holdup proved she had overcome something that was difficult,

indicating improvement. In *Wild Orchid* and *Waiting for No One*, Taylor, though extremely reluctant to go away to a new place for the summer, ended up breaking routine, venturing off alone in woods, discovered a desire to pursue Biology, and obtained part-time employment in a bookstore. In *Running on Dreams*, the reader realized Justin's growth when his parents thanked his peer aide, Brad, for bringing Justin out of his shell. In the beginning of the book, Justin had frequent meltdowns and was comfortable being alone. By the end of the book, Justin hugged Brad and let a girlfriend be affectionate with him. He also had a clear idea of the meaning of friendship.

In *Anything but Typical*, the CWA, Jason changed as a character. Though hesitant at first, he did attend the writing convention to meet a new friend. Additionally, a character Jason created on StoryBoard mirrored his own journey, transformation, and gradual acceptance of his disability. Christopher in *Curious Incident* said that he knew he could do anything now that he had travelled to London on his own and solved the mystery of who killed Wellington. And finally, another three CWA, Seb, Marcelo and Colin (from *Haze*, *Marcelo in the Real World*, and *Colin Fisher*) show growth in their social competence as they make new friendships.

Three of 11 CWA remained static throughout the storyline. In *Rules*, David did not command a central role in the storyline, and he made no significant change throughout the story. Instead, *Rules* focused on Catherine's evolution as she moved from shame to prioritizing and valuing meaningful friendships over popularity. In *The London Eye Mystery*, Ted solved a mystery, but did not significantly change and grow through the story progression. In *Mockingbird*, Caitlin also did not significantly change as a character; although at the end, she stated she felt empathy for the first time.

Hero or victim portrayal. None of the 14 stories painted the CWA as a victim. Three

stories portrayed the CWA as heroic (*Colin Fisher*, *The London Eye Mystery*, *Al Capone Shines My Shoes*). In *Colin Fisher* and *The London Eye Mystery*, the CWA saved the day by using deductive skills and strengths to solve a mystery. *Colin Fisher* solved the mystery of who brought the gun to school, became friends with the bully, and even had a love interest by the end of the story. In *The London Eye Mystery*, the partnership between Ted and his sister, Kat, made it possible to piece together their cousin's mysterious disappearance and ultimate rescue. Ted was the *brains*, while Kat was their connection to the public, as she made inquiries. The third hero book was *Al Capone Shines My Shoes*, where the CWA, Natalie, thwarted an inmate escape and hostage situation through her observation skills and her brother Moose's trust in her abilities.

Accuracy of Portrayal. Thirteen of fourteen portrayals of CWA were accurate in terms of common characteristics of those on the autism spectrum. The characters were sensitive to sound, touch, and light. They had difficulty with social interactions and changes in routine. Many also had a specific and all-encompassing interest such as numbers, the weather, computers, botany, and religion. One of the most frequently mentioned characteristics of ASD portrayed in the books was strict adherence to rules, literal interpretation, and difficulty with idioms. The CWA in the remaining book, *Anything But Typical*, did not show difficulty with figurative speech. In fact, his special interest was writing and fascination with words. Written in the first person, this book described Jason's thoughts with many similes and metaphors, which we felt was uncommon for those with ASD.

Plot

Realistic events. The analysis protocol involved examining storyline events with respect to whether they were realistic and reasonable rather than contrived. We defined contrived events as those that were possible, yet highly improbable. We considered seven of the books to have

contrived plots, two to be somewhat contrived, and five to have realistic events portrayed.

The first contrived plot appeared in *Haze*, where the main character, Seb, was investigated by undercover internet detectives under the suspicion that he was a computer *security cracker*. Although a teenager may possess the talent to crack into a computer system, the international ramifications and clandestine nature of this story made this an uncommon scenario for most teenagers. The *Al Capone* series also had contrived events such as the youth surreptitiously sending messages to and receiving messages from inmates, via notes left in pockets of clothing to be laundered and tied to the bodies of cockroaches. The likelihood of Al Capone using his connections to get the CWA into a special school, inmates using the CWA to smuggle escape tools onto the island; and the youth uncovering a counterfeit ring, thwarting an inmate escape, and intervening in an inmate's attempt to kill a guard also seemed unlikely to occur. The fifth contrived plot was *The London Eye Mystery*. Although child runaways do occur, Salim, the CWA's cousin and the runaway, planned an elaborate disappearance, just happened to take refuge in a building set for demolition, and was saved just in time; an uncanny coincidence. In *Mockingbird*, the CWA's brother was killed in a school shooting. He had been her conduit to the outside world and social interpreter. Her mother had died a few years prior and her grief-stricken father was emotionally fragile and relatively unavailable. The CWA insisted on completing a wooden chest her brother started in her concrete search for *closure*. It was a little unlikely that this single act would bring the grieving community together like it did in the storyline. The final contrived storyline occurred in *Colin Fisher*. Not only did Colin team up with his former bully and tormentor, but he also infiltrated an organized gang, La Familia, who had been selling guns to youth.

The two books that met the somewhat contrived category included *The Curious Incident*

of the Dog in the Nighttime and *Marcelo in the Real World*. Both CWA had to adjust to the *outside world* beyond their special schools, and both realized that their fathers were less than completely honest. Although these are realistic events, the CWA's reactions to their fathers' dishonesty were somewhat contrived. In *Curious Incident*, Christopher ran away from home utilizing public transportation to a big, unknown city even though he had never before been outside his small town. In *Marcelo*, the CWA gave secret product liability information to an opposing attorney who could ruin his father's law firm.

The five remaining books were more realistic in situations encountered by the CWA. The CWA in *Wild Orchid* and *Waiting for No One* found a job and went to college. In *Rules*, the topics of being embarrassed about having a sibling with autism and a friend with a physical disability became part of the plot line. *Running on Dreams* focused on the CWA's need for a peer aide, while dealing with the challenges of being included in a public school for the first time. Finally, *Anything But Typical*, described issues surrounding finding friends on the internet, but having difficulty with face-to-face interactions.

Conflicts. In nine of the 14 books, the character with ASD faced conflicts similar to those in his/her peer group. The CWA faced family conflicts in three of the nine books. In *Curious Incident* and *Marcelo in the Real World*, the male CWA became disillusioned with their fathers and questioned whom they could trust. In *Al Capone Does My Homework*, Natalie dealt with her father being in the hospital. In *Curious Incident*, the CWA also dealt with the separation of parents and issues of joint custody. The conflict of having a single parent and spending time with both parents was also present in *Wild Orchid* and especially in *Waiting for No One*.

In five of the nine books with peer-appropriate conflicts, the CWA encountered figuring

out romantic relationships for the first time in his/her life. The CWA experienced the uncertainty, anxiety and challenges that come with close relationships (*Haze*, *Wild Orchid*, *Running on Dreams*, *Anything But Typical*, and *Marcelo*). This conflict is familiar to non-disabled peers of the same age and is a popular theme in YAL (i.e., first love or young love). In *Colin Fischer*, *Running on Dreams*, and *Haze*, the characters with ASD dealt with developing reciprocal friendships, questions of loyalty to friends, and all three characters dealt with bullying. Taylor, in *Waiting for No One* entered college and went in search of a paying job, a very typical experience for a person her age.

In five of the books reviewed, the CWA did not face conflicts similar to those in his/her peer group. In two of the *Al Capone* books (*Al Capone Does My Shirts* and *Al Capone Shines My Shoes*), Natalie did not have experiences of a typical 16 year-old girl. She didn't have typical adolescent friendships; she tagged along with younger children, but participated only on the periphery. Although she met an inmate who appeared to like her, she did not respond with typical "first love" emotions. The female character with ASD in *Mockingbird* similarly did not deal with friendships, relationships, or other YAL conflicts. She experienced the death of her brother from a school shooting, but the public nature of such an event, and her search for closure as a tangible act was not a typical conflict for most individuals her age. The only mention of the ASD character, David, in *Rules*, was in reference to his sister. There was no mention of him having friends, engaging in community activities, or coping with anything outside his own rituals and routines. Finally, Ted in *The London Eye Mystery*, did not grapple with friendship issues or adolescent differentiation from parents that other teen characters in the book were experiencing.

Climax and resolution. In four books the climax and resolution did not focus on the character's autism. In *Haze* and *Marcelo in the Real World*, working together with new friends

helped to resolve the plot dilemma. Autism was part of the individual's characteristics, but did not influence the story's outcome. In *Wild Orchid*, the climax and resolution involved the CWA showing independence typical of any girl her age (not specific to someone with autism) much to the surprise of her mother. In one book, *Rules*, the climax and resolution focused on a disability, but not on autism. Catherine's brother had ASD, but climactic events focused on her friendship with a young man named Jason who had a physical disability. She had been hesitant to invite Jason to a dance because she feared it would lead to social rejection. However, by the end of the story, she did invite him, and hoped he forgave her for previous slights.

In ten of the 14 books, autism did play a central role in the climax and resolution of the story. The disability had a major impact on (a) family or community members, (b) developing friendships, or (c) solving a mystery. In the *Al Capone* books, the climax and resolution of the stories involved Natalie's autism, its effects on her family, especially her brother, and how her autism helped her see things the other kids did not. The first book depicted Natalie's brother, Moose, seeking inmate Al Capone's assistance in getting her accepted into a special school which seemed like her only hope for improvement. In the second book, Moose's faith that Natalie was never wrong about numbers and counting helped them escape from a hostage situation. The third book showed Natalie figuring out a cheating scheme and played a role in her brother yelling at just the right time when an inmate attacked their father.

In the three mystery novels, *Colin Fisher*, *The Curious Incident*, and *The London Eye Mystery*, the CWAs utilized their keen observation and analytic skills, characteristics of their ASD, to solve a mystery. In *Anything But Typical*, Jason was nervous about meeting his online friend in person. When she did meet him, she saw that he was *different* and made it clear that she was not interested in a romantic relationship. In *Mockingbird*, the climax and resolution focused

on Caitlin's finishing a wooden chest her brother had started to build before his death. Presenting the chest that would now close, literally brought *closure* for her, and symbolically it served to bring community members together. In *Waiting for No One*, Taylor avoided a phone call from a potential employer, because she had difficulty with communication. She finally talked to the employer who made an accommodation for her ASD and created a job better suited for her. In *Running on Dreams*, the climatic event was whether Brad, would support the CWA in a Special Olympics track meet, or choose to go to a track meet that would benefit himself.

Question of a cure. A cure for the disability was not the solution to the CWA's problems or conflicts in nine of the books. In five books, *Al Capone* series, *Rules* and *Mockingbird*, family members wished for the CWA to be different and were actively seeking to *fix* the individual. The sister of the CWA in *Rules* wished for her brother to be cured and tried to help him by writing concrete rules for acting appropriately. *Fixing* the disability was a major part of the plot in all three Al Capone books. Natalie's mother had searched for possible cures from faith healing and even voodoo to seeing a multitude of medical specialists. Getting Natalie into a separate school was the next hope to save her. Professionals working on a mission to cure Natalie's speech, eye contact, and fixations played a central role in the plots. In *Mockingbird*, people were either shunning or trying to fix Caitlin. Her counselor worked to teach her social skills and arranged friendship opportunities with younger children. Her father couldn't cope with her eccentricities and found her behavior too taxing during his time of grief. He enlisted the help of family and friends when he found Caitlin to be too much to handle.

In contrast, accepting and adapting played a role in the remaining books. In *Anything But Typical*, the CWA, Jason, created a character on Storyboard that rejected a cure for his fantasy condition. The character Jason created mirrored and systematically represented his own journey

and gradual acceptance of Asperger's syndrome. In *Wild Orchid*, Taylor, though extremely reluctant to go away to a new place for the summer, ended up breaking routine, venturing off alone in woods, discovered a desire to pursue Biology, and obtained part-time employment in a bookstore. In *Marcelo in the Real World*, the CWA's father wanted Marcelo to be *more normal* and to live in the *real world* rather than at his separate school where Marcelo felt most comfortable. His father arranged a summer job for Marcelo to push this agenda. Although awkward when Marcelo first arrived at his summer job, he adapted and demonstrated that he could function and survive in the competitive environment of the legal world. In *Running on Dreams*, the CWA had frequent meltdowns. By the end of the book, the CWA engaged in some perspective taking, tried to be a good friend, hugged his peer aide, and held hands and kissed his newfound girlfriend.

Theme

Friends and more than friends. The desire for friendships and making new friends including a boyfriend/girlfriend formed the thematic core of the storyline in nine of the 14 books reviewed. In *Rules*, the main character, Catherine, desired popularity, and her brother, the CWA, often did things that embarrassed her leading her to hide her brother whenever possible. In the meantime, Catherine forged a friendship with Jason, a non-verbal young man who used a wheelchair. Throughout the book, she feared that association with her brother and Jason may impede making friends with popular peers. The story concluded with Catherine publically announcing her friendship with Jason by inviting him to a school dance. In *Mockingbird*, Caitlin made friends with a younger boy, because the kids her age didn't accept her. Toward the end of the book, however, one popular girl noticed Caitlin's artistic talent and invited her to work with them on the yearbook. *Running on Dreams* described how Justin, the CWA developed a

reciprocal friendship with his assigned peer aide who was also a popular athlete. Justin also developed a romantic relationship with a girl he met in his special education class. In *Anything But Typical*, Jason, the CWA, had friends in an online community, yet did not experience acceptance in face-to-face interactions. Jason was anxious and wondered if his online *girlfriend* would accept him once she met him in real life. In *Wild Orchid* Taylor, the CWA, specifically embarked on a quest to find a boyfriend (albeit awkwardly) and developed a few friendships during her summer at a national park in Canada. In *Waiting for No One*, Taylor developed a friendship with a young man from her college biology class who had a brother with cerebral palsy. Her quest for independence coincided with moving out of her comfort zone to make new friends. Although the CWAs in *Colin Fisher*, *Haze*, and *Marcelo in the Real World* were not specifically seeking a romantic relationship, by the end of the story, they each found themselves with a good friend who was likely to become more than a friend.

Five books portrayed characters who were ambivalent about making friends. Throughout the *Al Capone* series, Natalie moved from being a burdensome tag-along to becoming an accepted part of the group of children on Alcatraz. However, Natalie seemed somewhat ambivalent about making friends. Because the story is written from her brother's perspective, the reader does not truly get a sense of Natalie's thoughts and desires, only her actions. On the other hand, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* and *The London Eye Mystery* were both told from the point of view of the CWA. Both CWAs seemed unaware or unconcerned about not having friends.

Family struggles. Difficulties of families must that support a member with autism was another recurring theme. A single-parent family was present in four books (three characters). In *Mockingbird*, the CWA's mother passed away while she was young; and she had difficulty

communicating with her father who was in the throes of grief from the recent death of his son, her brother. In *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, Christopher's mother had run away with another man leaving the father to be the sole provider and caregiver. Christopher's father created a story about Christopher's mother dying which created severe mistrust when the character learned that his mother was still alive. In *Wild Orchid* and *Waiting for No One*, Taylor dealt with the divorce of her parents. Her single mother cared for her, but she visited her father for the holidays. Taylor accepted her father's new relationship, but had difficulty adjusting to her mother's romantic partners.

In eight books, the CWA's relationship with a sibling played a major role in the development of the story. In the three *Al Capone* books, the CWA's mother taught piano lessons to make extra money to pay for a specialized school she hoped could rehabilitate Natalie. When his mother worked, Moose had to take care of Natalie. Many of the plot events came from Moose taking Natalie along on his adventures, his responsibility for her, and her often unpredictable behavior. In *Rules*, Catherine tried to help David navigate and better understand the world through writing rules for him. Despite her periodic embarrassment of David, a genuine concern resonated with Catherine for David. The sister of the CWA in the *London Eye Mystery* was his best friend and co-detective in solving the mystery of their missing cousin. Despite the vast differences between the brother and sister's personalities and interests, they complemented each other and the sister showed she cared in a light teasing typical teen manner. The supportive younger brother in *Anything But Typical* did not play a large role in the storyline, but stood on the sidelines as the mother and father had very different ways of approaching the CWA. In contrast, the younger brother in *Colin Fischer* showed animosity towards Colin's special needs and made hurtful comments towards his older brother. In *Mockingbird*, a supportive relationship

between Caitlin and her brother Devon was so strong she often retreated to a *safe space* located in his bedroom room after he passed away. She frequently remembered Devon's social coaching advice when in the presence of others such as "look at the person" and "mind your manners."

Doing the right thing. Four of the books featured the theme of doing the right thing and not succumbing to other pressures and personal experiences. Two books, *Colin Fischer* and *Marcelo in the Real World* featured CWAs who were faced with having to make an ethical decision and not succumb to peer pressure. In *Colin Fischer*, Colin decided to vindicate the school bully who tormented him when he was the primary suspect in the mystery of who brought the gun on campus. Colin could have allowed his tormentor to be wrongly accused, but he did the right thing and used his gifts of deduction to solve the mystery. In *Marcelo in the Real World*, Marcelo was placed in an ethical dilemma. He was privy to information that would negatively impact his father's law firm. Instead of protecting his father's law firm, and at great personal sacrifice, Marcelo ultimately did the right thing by bringing to light the incriminating information.

The remaining two books featured a character without disability who opted to do the right thing despite external pressures. In *Running on Dreams*, Brad sacrificed his athletic career and college scholarships to come through with a promise he made to Justin, the CWA, to train him and be there when Justin ran in the Special Olympics. In *Rules*, Catherine invited her friend with a disability to her school dance despite initial fears of being not accepted through association with someone with a disability.

Discussion

According to Carpenter (2010), we are living in the golden age of young adult literature. Thus, the power of YAL inclusion literature to influence public perceptions of individuals with

varied and diverse disabilities may be at its summit. Therefore, portrayal of characters in these books is important to analyze through a critical lens. Most of the books in our review were written from a first-person perspective offering the reader a glimpse into the mind of how a young adult with ASD perceives and interprets the world. Our books were similar to other YAL which commonly examines the world through the eyes of the young adult; approximately 60% to 65% of YAL is written in the present-tense from a first-person perspective (Feeney, 2013).

Most of the characters with ASD were able to speak for themselves expressing their wants, needs, likes, and dislikes. Most of the characters were portrayed as competent adolescents who had some weaknesses in addition to valuable strengths. For the most part, the characters in our review had multidimensional personalities and were not defined solely by their disability. They experienced growth, especially in terms of social relationships, over the course of events in the story. The sibling books seemed to be the exception. The CWA in the four sibling books, Natalie in the *Al Capone* series and David in *Rules*, were not multidimensional, competent characters. Because the focal point was the sibling's struggles and triumphs, the CWA were oftentimes portrayed as a burden; serving as little more than a prop to support the sibling's growth (Nelson, 1994). While the *Al Capone* series did show the CWA's growth over the three books, in general, the sibling books continued to perpetuate stereotypes about ASD to serve the purpose of adding complexity and conflicting emotions to the sibling's character.

Social relationships and acceptance by peers is of primary importance to most teens and important to positive adjustment and overall well-being (Waldrip, Malcolm, & Jensen-Campbell, 2008). However, lack of social awareness and difficulty with social communication are defining characteristics of autism. The books reviewed portrayed both the desire to be accepted and the difficulties with social interactions faced by the CWA. Only two of the 11 characters were

actively rejected, and another two characters were neither rejected nor accepted, they simply had no friends. Although the topic of bullying in YAL is not unique to inclusion literature, bullying and/or harmful teasing was experienced in a little over half of the stories (8 of the 14 books) we reviewed. That percentage is higher than in general YAL, but may reflect the reality that students with disabilities are more likely to be bullied than their non-disabled peers (Rose, Swearer, & Espelage (2012). This is especially true for students who are overtly different from their peer group, or who do not follow peer group norms (Rose, et al., 2012) which fits the profile of our characters without exception. Nevertheless, none of the stories cast the CWA as a victim; the characters experienced the bullying and moved on.

In all of the books reviewed, the events portrayed were possible, but in half of the books, the events were improbable and somewhat contrived. We must point out, however, that contrived events are not specific to inclusion literature; they are quite common in YAL in general (e.g., magic, vampires, fantasy, dystopian societies, and heroic feats). Many young adult novels also contain artificially dictated plots to let teen readers know they are not alone in their experiences and emotions (Bodart, Barrineau & Flamino, 2011).

Although Ayala (1999) recommended more ethnically diverse characters with disabilities in inclusion literature, our characters were mostly male, White and English speaking, although two books were set in Canada and one in Australia. The one exception was *Marcelo in the Real World*, whose parents were bilingual and of Mexican descent. Cultural and linguistic themes were present in the storyline, including the father forgetting his connection to the Hispanic community and being perceived as a sell-out. All of the characters were middle class with access to good schools and disability services. For the most part, teachers and parents understood the disability, and were aware of appropriate interventions.

It appeared that in the books reviewed there was a strategic effort to educate the reader. The authors had clearly researched Asperger's syndrome and/or Autism Spectrum Disorders; and several authors had a family member with ASD or had been a teacher of students with ASD. Van Hart (2012) examined accuracy of the portrayal of common characteristics of ASD. The characteristics were hyper- or hypo-sensitivity, attraction to patterns and rituals, language barriers, social barriers and mind-blindness (or the inability to anticipate and interpret the thoughts and feelings of others). Characters in the current review were accurately portrayed with respect to these characteristics. However, some of our books painted a misleading perception that people with ASD are intellectually gifted, quirky, lovable social misfits. While this may be true for some individuals, this is not representative of the majority of individuals living with ASD. Approximately half of the individuals who experience ASD have below average intelligence with an IQ below 70-75 (Soulières, et al., 2011; Volkmar et al., 2004). In most cases, low intellectual functioning is accompanied by difficulties in adaptive behavior. This includes reading and writing skills, handling money, interactions with others, household chores, self-care skills, and coping with the demands of daily life (Tasse' et al., 2012). The YAL books we reviewed did not appear to portray some of these more debilitating effects of autism. Only five of 14 books (3 characters, in *Rules*, *Mockingbird* and *Al Capone* series) depicted the CWA as having deficits in adaptive behavior. Only one of the 14 books (*Rules*) showed a character that had below average intelligence.

Of the 14 books reviewed with 11 characters, not one character had difficulty speaking. With the exception of the sibling books, the characters had difficulty with figurative language, an element that added light humor to the story, but did not have difficulty speaking. It is estimated that perhaps as many as 50% of individuals with autism may not acquire speech as their primary

mode of communication (Prizant, 1996). This fact has led to the many current educational practices utilizing assistive and augmentative communication devices including Speech Generating Devices (SGD), Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS), iPad apps and so forth. Once again, most of our characters had Aspergers Syndrome (AS) which is often characterized by typical verbal language development. But, even among those individuals with functional speech, understanding is usually more limited than what one would expect on the basis of their expressive vocabulary. Our characters were not representative of most individuals with autism; instead, they were high functioning, highly verbal individuals who had difficulties with idioms and sarcasm, but had no difficulty with language comprehension. It appears that a character with many strengths, but who interprets language literally, and struggles socially makes for a variety of interesting and engaging dilemmas.

Recommendations for Teaching

Young Adult Literature has the power to help youth construct a greater understanding of diversity, which in turn, may foster empathy and acceptance. By using inclusion literature, teachers can ease fears born of ignorance and “replace negative stereotypes with knowledge and understanding about disabilities” (Andrews, 1998, p. 420). Using inclusion literature also provides a perspective different from textbooks, lectures, or personal accounts (Miller, 2012). Adolescents may connect better with these novels because the characters are similar in age and face similar conflicts; and students may realize they share characteristics with those who happen to have a disability (Andrews, 1998). Teachers, with carefully selected inclusion literature, can teach respect for differences and promote positive images of those with disabilities. Students may then “better understand their own feelings and experience what it means to live with special needs” (Miller, p. 28). The key to fully harnessing the power of YAL for the purpose of

education rests in how YAL is utilized as a tool in the classroom setting.

Curwood (2012) stressed the importance of utilizing a Critical Literacy approach to educate students regarding topics such as disability. Critical literacy has been defined as the use of books and other sources of art and media to educate and promote social justice (Luke, 2012). Through the medium of literature, students gain understanding and awareness of controversial issues in society, as well as the ability to detect undercurrents of negative or overly positive portrayals in works of literature and the arts. Curwood further proposed that Marcelo's (of *Marcelo in the Real World*) ethical dilemma can be used to stimulate classroom discussion on sensitive issues such as equality as they are raised throughout the storyline (2012). Critical literacy is a political orientation to teaching aimed at shifting long-standing and dominant ideologies (Luke, 2012). The goal is to have critical literacy lead to a greater understanding of how texts may be utilized to send messages that may help re-shape thoughts, perceptions, and the world (Luke, 2012).

According to Gavignan and Kurtts (2011), bibliotherapy is a process by which literature helps students understand themselves and gain empathy and acceptance regarding issues of diversity. Bibliotherapy using inclusion literature may be a tool to help support acceptance of students with disabilities. Teachers may utilize questioning to activate student background knowledge regarding diversity and help students see similarities with one another despite differences (Prater, Dyches & Johnstun, 2006). Questions can be asked to prompt students to see disability through a different lens and perspective (Miller, 2013). Wopperer (2011) suggests that teachers form an integral partnership with librarians so they can become aware of YAL that accurately portrays disability. However, not all YAL is suitable for classroom use. Therefore, teachers should carefully screen books in advance (Prater, 2003). It is not enough to simply have

students read books on the subject of disability and diversity, teachers must be prepared to scaffold learning so students are guided through questions that help them internalize what they read.

Teachers wield a power to help their students understand themselves, formulate understandings of sensitive and integral social issues, and help students realize the power they possess to initiate social change and alter stereotypes. As students learn through literature, people develop awareness and eventually empathy and acceptance for diversity. With such exposure, students better understand their own feelings and experience what it means to live with special needs (Wopperer, 2011).

As YAL increases in popularity, reaching adults and adolescents alike, messages sent through this creative medium integrally shapes the public's understanding of disability and diversity. Future study is recommended to study the accuracy of portrayal of ASD and types of support services put in place to effectively mainstream and integrate students with ASD into educational and public settings.

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Table 1. Books Included in Analysis

Book /Publisher	Author	Award	Year
<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime</i> New York: Vintage a Division of Penguin Random House	Mark Haddon	- Book Trust teenage fiction award -Man Booker Award -Whitbred Book Award Best Novel of the Year - Dolly Gray Award (2004)	2003
<i>Haze</i> London: Jessica Kingsley	Kathy Hoopmann	- National Association of Special Education Needs Children's Book Award, UK	2003
<i>Wild Orchid</i> ¹	Beverley Brenna	- Young Adult Book Award by the Canadian Library Association	2005
<i>Waiting for No One</i> ¹ Markham, Ontario: Red Deer Press		- Dolly Gray Award for Children's Literature (2012)	2011
<i>Al Capone Does My Shirts</i> ^{2,3}	Gennifer Choldenko	- Newbery Honor selection - California Young Reader Medal - Publisher's Weekly Best Book of the Year	2006
<i>Al Capone Shines My Shoes</i> ^{2,3}			2009
<i>Al Capone Does My Homework</i> ^{2,3} NY: Puffin a Division of Penguin Random House			2013
<i>Rules</i> ³ New York: Scholastic.	Cynthia Lord	- Newbery Award - Schneider Family Book Award - ALA Notable Children's Book	2006
<i>Running on Dreams</i> Lenexa, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company	Herb Heiman	- Eric Hoffer Award Winner, Young Adult Category	2007
<i>The London Eye Mystery</i> New York: Yearling.	Siobhan Dowd	- School Library Journal Best Book of the Year - Kirkus Review's Best Children's Book Award - Book Sense Children's Pick List Award - Dolly Gray Award (2010)	2008
<i>Anything But Typical</i> New York: Simon and Schuster.	Nora Raleigh Baskin	- Schneider Family Book Award for Middle Grades (Ages 11-13) - Junior Library Guild Selection	2009

		- ALA (American Library Association) Notable Children's Books	
<i>Marcelo in the Real World</i> New York: Arthur A. Levine.	Francisco Stork	- YALSA Best Book for Young Adults - Publisher's Weekly Best Book of the Year - Schneider Family Book Award	2010
<i>Mockingbird</i> New York: Philomel a Division of Penguin Random House	Kathryn Erskine	- National Book Award for Young People's Literature - International Reading Association Award - ALA Best Fiction for Young Adults - Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award	2012
<i>Colin Fischer</i> New York: Razorbill a Division of Penguin Random House	Ashley Miller and Zack Stentz	- American Booksellers Association Young Adult Honor Award	2013

14 books, 11 different characters with autism spectrum disorders (CWA)

¹ In *Waiting for No One* and *Wild Orchid*, the same character, Taylor, has Asperger's syndrome.

² In the *Al Capone* series, one character, Natalie has autism, however, the books are set in the 1930s before much was known about autism

³ A sibling book where the CWA was a sibling of the main character.

Table 2. Criteria for Analysis

Element	Criteria
Characterization	Does the Character with autism (CWA) speak for him/herself? Whose point of view is presented? Is the CWA portrayed as competent, including strengths and weaknesses? Is the CWA socially accepted or rejected due to his/her disability? Is the CWA multi-dimensional? Is the CWA portrayed as a hero, victim or neither? Even though the book is fiction, data pertaining to the disability is accurate.
Plot	-The events are realistic and reasonable rather than contrived. -The character with disabilities (CWA) faces conflicts similar to those in his/her peer group. -Although both climax and ending may include the CWA, it does not focus on the disability. -A cure for the disability is not the solution to the CWA's problems or conflicts.
Theme	What is the main theme/concept of the book?

Table 3. Book Synopses

Synopsis
<p>1. <i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime</i> (2003) by Mark Haddon.</p> <p>Christopher Boone lives in England with his father. When the neighbor's dog, Wellington, is killed, Christopher investigates the murder. As he investigates, Christopher discovers that his father lied about his mother being dead. Christopher begins an adventure to find his mom which involves going on a train to London and facing lots of new things. This is the first well-known YAL having a character with ASD. It is the reference point for many authors and reviewers.</p>
<p>2. <i>Haze</i> (2003) by Kathy Hoopman</p> <p>Seb (Sebastian) is a loner. He is brilliant with numbers and computers; but lacks social skills. Someone traced to Seb's high school has cracked into a company's computer system. An investigator who poses as the new computer teacher takes an interest in Seb and helps him see that he has Asperger's syndrome. He discloses his self-diagnosis to three girls who become more understanding of his behavior. Seb is soon caught up in a web of computer fraud and lies and enlists the help of the three girls and a mysterious cyber friend.</p>
<p>3. <i>Wild Orchid</i> (2005) by Beverly Brenna</p> <p>Taylor, an 18 year-old with Asperger's syndrome, goes on summer vacation in Saskatchewan, Canada where her mom will work at a boyfriend's Pizza restaurant. Taylor decides it is time to find a boyfriend, but does so in the wrong way. Although Taylor is resistant to change, she starts enjoying her stay when she becomes involved with a nature group. She makes friends with the nature group's leader, who is married; gets her first job at the nature center bookstore; and makes friends with a couple of co-workers. She doesn't want to leave when her mother suddenly cuts the trip short.</p> <p>4. <i>Waiting for No One</i> (2011) by Beverly Brenna</p> <p>Taylor returns to Saskatoon and enrolls in a biology course at the university. She tries to get a job at a bookstore, but does not do well in the interview. She doesn't get the job as a clerk, but is hired to stock and arrange books after hours. In the meantime, Taylor makes a friend with a boy at college who has a brother with cerebral palsy. Throughout the book, Taylor focuses on what she needs to do to <i>become independent</i>.</p>
<p>5. <i>Al Capone Does My Shirts</i> (2006) by Gennifer Choldenko</p> <p>Moose Flannagan, a 12 year-old boy, lives with his family on Alcatraz island in 1935. His sister, Natalie, has autism (before autism is recognized). Their mother is obsessed with finding a cure and securing a place for Natalie in a special school (she isn't allowed to attend a regular school). When Natalie is rejected from the special school, her mother falls into depression. Moose secretly writes a note to Al Capone, who works in the prison laundry, asking him to help Natalie. A few weeks later, Natalie is accepted into a brand-new wing of the school for older children, to the delight of the entire Flanagan family. Moose gets a note in his newly-washed shirt that says "done."</p> <p>6. <i>Al Capone Shines My Shoes</i> by Gennifer Choldenko</p> <p>Natalie is in her special school, the Esther P. Marinoff School, and visits Alcatraz only on weekends and school breaks. Released Inmate #105, now a gardener at Natalie's school, gives</p>

her a bar-spreader to take back to Alcatraz for the inmates. The bar-spreader is intercepted, but Moose, Natalie, and the Warden's daughter and new baby are taken hostage by inmates in an escape plot. The kids of the island foil the escape with the help of Natalie's keen observation skills.

7. *Al Capone Does My Homework* (2013) by Gennifer Choldenko

Moose falls asleep while tending Natalie and a fire starts that destroys their apartment. Natalie is accused of starting the fire; several adults want her off the island, saying she is dangerous. Moose and his friends investigate and find the fire is unrelated to Natalie. Natalie's family and therapist try to get her to look people in the eye. At the end of the book she is able to do so in order to visit their father in the hospital.

8. *Rules* (2013) by Cynthia Lord

Catherine's younger brother, David, has autism. Although she loves him, she is embarrassed to be seen with him, feels burdened when she is asked to watch him, and feels neglected by her parents because they pay more attention to him. Catherine has created rules for David that appear throughout the book to tell the story e.g., keep your pants on in public; if the bathroom door is closed, knock; no toys in the fishtank).

Catherine befriends a young man, Jason, who is nonverbal and uses a wheelchair while she waits for her brother in the therapist's office. She is a good artist who starts making cards for Jason's communication book. Jason likes Catherine, but she is concerned that liking someone like Jason will not raise her social status.

9. *Running on Dreams* (2007) by Herb Heinman

Brad, a ninth-grade track star is assigned to be a peer aide of a new student Justin, who has autism. Justin looks up to Brad, and joins the Special Olympics track team so he can be more like Brad. Brad has relationship issues with a girlfriend who is superficial and doesn't want him hanging around unpopular kids including Justin. Brad faces peer pressure and the struggle with doing what's right. Justin struggles with being in a school with typically-developing peers for the first time, the desire to have friends and to belong, and develops his first girlfriend/boyfriend relationship.

10. *The London Eye Mystery* (2008) by Sioban Dowd

Ted, a boy with Asperger's syndrome, and his sister take their cousin, Salim, to an amusement park to ride the London Eye, a giant Ferris wheel. Salim and his mother are staying with Ted's family in London for a few days before they board a plane and move to New York City. Salim doesn't come down from the London Eye and has apparently disappeared. Ted is determined to solve the mystery. He generates and tests theories in an investigation with his sister. Ted solves the mystery just in the nick of time and finds Salim locked in a deserted building scheduled for demolition.

11. *Anything But Typical* (2009) by Nora Raleigh Baskin

Jason Blake is a 12-year-old with ASD, who is a great writer and a deep thinker. He has no friends at school and is often bullied. His social network consists of people on Storyboard, a site where he writes and posts stories. He meets a young girl, and starts an online friendship, his first friendship. This all comes to a head when he plans to attend a Storyboard conference and finds out she will be there too. He questions whether she is a *girlfriend* and is worried she won't like

him because of his ASD. They meet, do not become boyfriend/ girlfriend, but decide to continue to read each other's work online. Taking a ride on an airplane, being away from home, and figuring out romantic relationships all play a role in the story.

12. *Marcelo in the Real World* (2010) by Francisco X. Stork

Marcelo, who has Asperger's syndrome, has always attended a special school -- a school with a therapeutic horse-riding program. Marcelo was looking forward to training the horses in the summer. However, his father announces that Marcelo will work at his father's law firm to experience *the real world*. At the law firm, Marcelo encounters ethical dilemmas that involve hypocrisy, deceit, trust, and loyalty. Marcelo struggles with the gray areas of the *real world* and maintains integrity throughout. Readers are left to believe that the one true friend he developed at the law firm, Jasmine, may become a girlfriend.

13. *Mockingbird* (2012) by Kathryn Erskine

Caitlin is a fifth grade student who is a talented artist and has Asperger's syndrome. Her older brother was her social interpreter and guide until "The Day Our Life Fell Apart" when he was killed in a school shooting. A school counselor helps Caitlin try to make friends and learn social rules. Caitlin meets her "first real friend, a younger boy whose mother was also a victim of the school shooting. Caitlin searches for closure as if it were a tangible object or event. She finds closure as she convinces her father, who has been nearly incapacitated by grief, to help her complete a wooden chest her brother began before his death.

14. *Colin Fischer* (2013) by Ashley Edward Miller and Jack Stentz

The book's catch phrase is "Solving a crime, one facial expression at a time." Colin, a high school student with Asperger's syndrome, is regularly bullied. One day there is a scuffle in the school cafeteria and a gun goes off. Colin is curious and examines the gun after everyone else has run away. He is quickly cleared of being the shooter, but the wrong student is blamed. The assumed culprit is a tough guy who has never been nice to Colin, but Colin wants the truth to come out. A relationship develops between the two unlikely friends as they uncover who really brought the gun to school.