



## What It Means to Be Different: A Daily Struggle of August Pullman in Wonder (2017)

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### Abstract

*Devout and emotional, written with an earnest pencil whose ultimate aim is to reflect the harsh journey of a young boy born with a genetic facial difference, the cinematic adaptation of Wonder (2017) is a portrayal of the struggles, determination and perseverance of little beings remonstrated as different. Recounting an emotional family drama based on R.J. Palacio's award-winning novel of the same name, Wonder centres on Auggie Pullman, a young boy born with a severe facial anomaly. Therefore, this essay presents a critically socio-psychological analysis of Wonder (2017). The present paper reflects an awareness about the negative impact that words can have on children and the importance of being kind to prevent aggression through a word, or a gesture. The purpose of this essay is to examine Auggie's behaviour and psyche in various social contexts, and to portray that social stigma and aggression lead the child to self-stigma.*

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## 1. Introduction

Wonder (2017), passionately based on Raquel Jaramillo Palacio 2012 award-winning novel Wonder, and fervently portraying an earnest and emotional family drama, Wonder is a thrilling depiction of what it means to be different and what it feels to be disabled. Beautifully capturing the long journey of a facially disfigured man-child, Wonder traces the harsh path of a young boy with a genetic facial difference named August Pullman. Fuelled by struggles, pain, downs, determination and perseverance, Auggie's storyline tells that not every person was born to this world with a perfect condition. Based on a real life story, Wonder addresses the difficulty of being different in a world where being real is an act of rebellion; a true revolt which might instore plausible physical injuries, but surely undisputable invisible psychological wounds quite difficult to heal. Representing millions of children who are abused every day physically and

psychologically, *Wonder* outcries that at a stage where these beings do not yet have a complete personality, a look, a gesture or a word can change their lives towards the best or the worst.

Based on a book which has become international, based on a writing which has stolen the hearts of millions of people of all ages, R.J. Palacio's children's book *Wonder* has proved to fit perfectly the universe of attracting pictures and fascinating animations. Rendered a crucial element of the cinematic production, the movie adaptation of *Wonder* strengthens the fact that the connectedness between cinema and literature is deemed iconic. Indeed, when literature as a creatively recognized body of writing of rarified artistic values is conjoined with cinema as an advanced instrumentality of dispersing moving pictures, a true work of art is created. Indeed, cinema has always had a noteworthy link with literature. Transferring the muted and the unspoken succession of events in literature to the dynamic and interesting world of moving iconography, cinema renders the unseen visible by delivering "a unique and surreal vision to the world" (Hamsi and Hamza Reguig Mouro, 2023, p.70). That is, the transfer of a work or story, in whole or in part, to feature a film creates a vent for the viewer to escape, endeavouring at developing empathy towards the story and the characters, and at creating a genuine experience and an unfeigned opportunity at identifying with people who are simply regarded as different. Throughout the vivacity of characters and attractiveness of pictures, cinema possesses not only the ability to entertain, but to also translate profound and abstract ideas and thoughts to the screen; morals and messages which contain deep meaning and heavy realities.

Demonstrating no exception, the 2017 cinematic adaptation of *Wonder* instructs about all the various themes which the book carry. Incorporating a beautifully accurate depiction of the Treacher Collins Syndrome, *Wonder* reveals the prejudice, discrimination, racism and stigmatization disabled people suffer from. In a world where everything is evolving except man, Auggie Pullman from *Wonder* unveils the social stigma he endured and the harsh self-stigma he fell in. Mirroring the difficulty of building the self-identity as 'the other', representing an inner struggle and constant reminder of remaining strong, and ambitiously motivated to fit in a completely unfamiliar environment, Auggie's storyline is a showcase of feeling rejected, alienated, humiliated and underestimated. Therefore, the present paper aims largely at revealing the psychological barriers August Pullman faced in finding his true self. It puts forth an awareness about the negative impact that words can have on children and the importance of being kind to prevent aggression through a word, a look, a smile or a gesture. Certainly, the objectives which frame this essay will be to understand and examine Auggie's behaviour and psyche in various

social contexts, and to out voice that social stigma and aggression lead the child to self-stigma; to lose his/her self-esteem, confidence and valorisation.

## 2. *Children's Book Wonder Becomes a Movie*

Quite catchy and astounding, and by virtue of the power of words inserted in literature and by means of vivid graphic and audible techniques adopted by cinema, the greatest attempt of cinema is to make “the unseen visible” (Flavin, 2004, p. 5). Veritably, literature and cinema possess various points in common. Highly inspired by literature as much as literature is inspired by cinema-an ambition of the ancients as the author Joseph Conrad made obvious back in 1897 in the preface of his novel, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*: “My Task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel it before all, to make you see”- literature and cinema’s mutual influence is justified by their possession of two key common factors: narrative and storytelling. Endeavouring at embarking the viewer in either a mental or visual stimuli to provide an unforgettable experience of perceiving, assimilating and interpreting based on their own understanding and background, both of literature and cinema display an emotional experience throughout their artworks.

Likewise, “in the era of interdisciplinary, nothing is healthier than trying to see the literature’s verblancy from the perspective of cinema and the movie iconicity from the perspective of literature” (Brito cited in Gualda, 2010, p. 202). Furthermore, “just like the significance of narrative in human culture can be seen from the fact that written cultures seek their origins in myths which they then record for posterity” (Fludernik, 2009, p. 1), the movie industry aims also at enriching its history by registering the numerous scenes acted and played by men. Therefore, both of literature and cinema desire a history of their own; a long recorded narrative of past events which ensures the continuum of both empires. In this this sense, the French film theorist Astruc (1948) claims that: “the filmmaker/author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen”. Then, based on a specific narrative structure and on an embraced referential nature, film and literature as Orr (1992, qtd in Bane, 2006, p. 12) declares that both produce stories which work through temporal succession,

“Both refer to, or connote, pre-existent materials. Fiction works through a pre-existent language, film through the raw data of the physical world its camera record. In both cases, words and images give off associations which go beyond the immediacy of their physical objects” (Hamsi and Hamza Reguig Mouro, 2023, p.177)

Accordingly, either through the exponent of ink or through captivating imagery and fascinating sounds, the ultimate purport of both literature and film production is to bring through to the reader/viewer an unforgettable experience full of great interaction of the senses and high identification to the stories. Displaying an unprecedented relationship between literature and cinema, the invention of cinema brought to the front considerations as well as new techniques and approaches to the literary text; a revolution that would have certainly not occurred without movie adaptation. Allowing for an astonishing transference to occur between one medium and another, it is thence worth to highlight that “if film did not grow out of literature, it grew towards it; and what novels and films most strikingly have in common is the potential and propensity for narrative” (McFarlane, 1996). Densely marking the universe of cinema is surely the cinematic adaptation of the children’s book *Wonder* into a movie.

Pertaining to a genre made exceptionally to instruct and entertain children, children’s literature encompasses at the same time a wide variety of works, including acknowledged classics of world literature including fairy tales, lullabies, fables, folk songs, and other folklore materials. Regarded as a distinct and independent form of literature in the second half of the 18th century, the 20th century witnessed the epicurean growth and establishment of the genre as a recognized branch of literature (Firouzimoghaddam, 2021). Written in a simple and fun way, children’s literature allows youngsters to learn norms and values without even realizing it. Approaching the world from childhood, children’s writings permit the child to be creative to draw an image on the characters involved in the story and to use his imagination to reach the essence of the story. Likewise, each child interprets, experiences and lives the story differently.

Including books of the highest calibre, representing complex plots and concepts, children’s literature is indeed said to be a collection of books written for children, read by children and/or written about children. Targeted to an audience under the age of eighteen, children’s literature might at times be called young adult literature. In other words, it is known that the United Nations in 1989 recognizes anyone under the age of eighteen as a minor child, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (2015) defines children as unmarried persons under twenty one years of age, and the United States criminal code defines a “minor” as any person under the age of eighteen years. Therefore, in the book industry, teenagers have established their own demographic. Taking hold in 1957, the Young Adult label was formed when the American Library Association (ALA) divided the Association of Young People's Librarians (established in 1941) into the Children's Library Association and the Young Adult Services Division for the purposes

of providing differentiated services to groups of youth who have different social, emotional, and literacy needs (Starr, 2015).

Carrying humorous content, fuelled with powerful, meaningful and instructional substances, children or young adult's writings have proved to be worth of value, regard and estimation. Highly appropriate and suitable for cinema's elaborate techniques of rendering the unspoken seeable, the story of R.J. Palacio is a story which denotes the power of ink on the screen. Based on a real life story, *Wonder* is a story of courage, kindness, friendship and character. As great qualities which highly define the human being, portraying the essence of this storyline on the screen helps in outvoicing the inner outrage, shame, discrimination, feeling of rejection, underestimation and introversion people with disabilities hide deep in them. Thoughtful and quite considerable, the story behind *Wonder* can but be screened by the public.

### **3. *The Story Behind R.J. Palacio's Wonder***

A first generation American as a daughter of Colombian immigrants, R.J. Palacio was born on July 13, 1963 in New York City. Before becoming an author, Palacio went to The High School of Art & Design in Manhattan, and then majored in illustration at the Parsons School of Design. Spending her junior year at The American University in Paris, Palacio traveled extensively before returning to NYC with an eye toward making her career in illustration. Passionate and creative, her early works appeared in *The Village Voice* and *The New York Times Book Review*, which eventually led into her storied career as the art director of several major book publishing companies. Designing thousands of book covers for countless writers in every genre of fiction and non-fiction, including Paul Auster, Thomas Pynchon, Salman Rushdie, Louise Ehrdrich, Sue Grafton, and John Fowles, Palacio became a legend in what she does (Palacio, 2019).

In addition to designing book covers, Palacio illustrated several of her own children's books which were published under her birth name, including *Peter Pan: The Original Tale of Neverland*; *Ride Baby Ride*; *Look Baby Look*; *The Night Before Christmas*; *The Handiest Things in the world*; and *Last Summer* (Martinez, 2019). Carrying the soul of an artist, Palacio did as well invent a baby toy called *The Bobo Glove*; a movable, wearable, washable activity toy for infants (ibid). However, always dreamed of writing her own book one day; she always aspired at putting her own thoughts, beliefs and perceptions on a paper until she realized that it was high time to finally get involved into something that truly reflects her desire and identity. She, thus, decided to start writing her very first novel under the name of *Wonder*; a one which in short order became lovable and international.

Interested and involved in exposing and revealing the same values and perspectives which formulated the essence of her very first book, *Wonder* was then followed by a collection of books notably *365 Days of Wonder: Mr. Browne's Book of Precepts* (2014), *Auggie & Me* (2015) (ibid), which includes print editions of the original e-book novelas: *The Julian Chapter*, *Pluto*, and *Shingaling*, *We Are All Wonders* (2017), which she both wrote and illustrated.

However, *Wonder* remains the artwork that ingrained wonder and amazement in the universe of literature. Published in 45 countries, elected five times as a the New York Times bestseller since March 2012, and with over five million copies sold worldwide, the book's message of kindness has inspired the Choose Kind movement, and has been embraced by readers, young and old, around the world. Departing from a real-life 'mom moment' to an emotional bestseller to finally a movie starring Jacob Tremblay as Auggie Pullman, Julia Roberts and Owen Wilson in 2017, the story behind writing *Wonder* cannot go invisible. Indeed, the moment which led to the bestselling children's novel *Wonder*- with its message about the power of kindness, tolerance, words and treatment that are now at the centre of the 2017 adapted movie- is one that author R.J. Palacio wishes she could take back.

In an interview with Palacio, the author revealed that the story is based on a real situation she lived in 2007. Palacio declared:

I was in front of an ice cream store with my two sons and my younger son, who was only 3 at the time, saw a little girl that had a very significant craniofacial difference. He got a little scared and he started to cry. I decided to get up discreetly to avoid that situation and that the girl felt hurt. I did not make it. Caleb came out of the ice cream store and I told him to get going, but his ice cream fell off. While Joseph, as I had suspected, began to cry because he had seen the girl. I heard that girl's mother say, 'I think it's time to leave'. And I felt terrible. Because I wanted to protect my son, I had hurt that family. (cited in Miller, 2017).

Palacio further continued acknowledging that in that very unpleasant situation:

In my haste to kind of shield her from seeing his response or his reaction to her face, I kind of whisked him away really quickly. Afterwards, I started really thinking what I should have done, of course, is just turn to the little girl and maybe started up a conversation and shown by example that it was really nothing to be afraid of. That just

got me thinking about what it must be like to face a world every day that does not quite know how to face you back. (ibid).

As she was reflecting on the awkwardness of what had happened that day, according to the writer, the song of the artist Natalie Merchant "Wonder" sounded on the radio; a short musical composition about the suffering of people from diseases that make them different. On that very same day and by night, Palacio started writing Wonder. Pertaining to a writer who believes and affirms that like Wonder, A lot of the sub-stories were somewhat drawn from true life events and encounters, her son Caleb whose is now 21 years old told her when he read Wonder then as a 9th grader : “"Mom, this is really great. This should be required reading in every middle school. But could not you have done a better job of changing some of those stories in there?"” (ibid). Published in 2012, and in the greatest effort of spreading the book’s motto, Choose Kind, the unfathomed secret to Wonder’s broad appeal is simple; it is a very optimistic and exhortatory book which restores hope, braveness, and gentle implementations of treating and dealing with people who feel different at a time where it is quite primordial to be reminded that there is an inherent goodness in people.

#### **4. *A Precis of Wonder (2017)***

The story of August Pullman, a boy with facial distortion caused by a rare genetic condition who enters middle school after years of home-schooling, is a story of passion and compassion. A story about how to confront the discomfort around difference, as Auggie makes friends, faces bullying and makes it through the gauntlet of fifth grade, the storyline of Auggie shifts narrators to show the perspectives of Auggie, his classmates, his parents, his older sister the do-gooders, and the mean kids “offering a sympathetic look at the inner worlds of tweens and teens alike” (Miller, 2017). Making a great impact all over the world, Wonder has been a best-seller, and the book has been embraced by towns, schools and the craniofacial community. Indeed, the book stimulated many to write poems and songs to finally be on the screen.

Smart, sensitive and filled with dreams like so many children of his age, August Pullman is a tough, sweet, 10-year-old boy, who was born with distorted facial features; a "craniofacial difference" caused by an anomaly in his DNA. As a smart child who likes to read and greatly finds a special interest in science, August spends most of his time watching the Star Wars saga and playing with his dog Daisy. Auggie, as his parents affectionately call him, has been fortunate to be born into a loving family that has always shown overprotection towards him at a time where it is

harsh and unruly to face the cruelty of the world without love and support. Although this child's life seems totally normal, it is not really. To be able to breathe, listen and eat normally, Auggie had to have a surgery more than twenty-seven times as he suffers from a strange disease called Treacher-Collins Syndrome. As a very rare, genetic condition affecting the way the face develops, the various surgical interventions have prevented Auggie from going to school; he was obliged to study at home with his mother Isabel until one day his parents decided that it is high time for him to integrate school and this is where the story truly begins. With a helmet upon his head to hide his face, this is how August Pullman was ready to face the unknown.

At first, Auggie flatly refused to go to school fearing the judgements of others and dreadfully knowing that all the children were going to make fun of him. Withal, little by little Auggie started to accept the idea that it is time to take the step and try. As this experience might seem and be hard, and terrible, but Auggie was ready and optimistic about making friends, learning and having fun. Unfortunately, his classmates do not facilitate his integration to school. The first day was not easy at all. Making him feel different and rejected, not a child wanted to sit next to him in any of the classes, and throughout the year many of them mocked his physical appearance, looked at him as if he were a monster, pointed and whispered about him. Surrounded by a supportive and extraordinary family, Auggie may not be the luckiest physically, but his family makes of his path easier. Agreeing that school is a difficult place for Auggie to be, the days spent there became peculiar as he had the opportunity to meet two friendly and audacious children: Summer and Jack. Auggie made sure to fit in his school and to portray that a facial distortion as his cannot be an obstacle for success and integrity.

## **5. *An Internalized Stigma in Wonder***

Confronted to merciless looks, judgements and discernment, attempting to fit into a society where disabled people are regarded different and granted no value and appreciation, August Pullman in Wonder (2017) finds difficulties in ascertaining his place in society. Internalizing an inner shame and embarrassment about himself due to his disability, the following section is fully devoted at unveiling the self stigma, social stigma and bullying from which Auggie suffered; a part fully consecrated to social psychology in Wonder.

### **5.1. *Stigmatization and Social Psychology in Wonder***

Displaying the psychological condition of a physically disabled child as the main character, Auggie's psyche becomes quite significant in analyzing, explaining and depicting the



psychological issue in the movie. Regarded as an approach which studies the mind and behaviour of the human being as an individual in the society, the word psychology is derived from the Latin word “psyche” meaning life, and “logos” which refers in its turn to explanation. Indeed, in the early years of the development of psychology, the emphasis was primarily put on the individual. As a matter of fact, as most psychologists simply isolated the individual from other to use for tests and experiments, most came down to the conclusion that any character attributes the person exhibited in the laboratory was a fair denotation of the way people would generally behave, act and react under any circumstances. In other words, if a person felt delighted and could easily produce jokes in one situation that person would remain as humorous in any other situation. Another example would be if a student performed well in one examination he is surely expected to perform well in other examinations.

However, a few decades into the development of psychology, the influence of the social environment became apparent. Psychologists begun to scrutinize that there might be considerable differences between the way people acted on tests taken in privacy in the laboratory and in the midst of other people or under different social circumstances. It, therefore, became quite clear and catchy that human behaviour and human personality were not necessarily consistent. A humorous person, an intelligent student or even a highly tempered individual would showcase those personality traits only when the social situation permits. A child may tell lies in one social situation- such as in school to escape punishments- but readily owns up to his misbehaviour when he is at home as the hostility of the school environment is different from the friendship and love he enjoys at home. The child is then only adapting to the dictates of the situations. Consequently, human beings are fundamentally social beings, i.e.; the man’s thoughts, actions and feelings are affected by the presence of others. This realization that human behaviour and personality are not necessarily consistent led to what is known as social psychology.

Taking place at the dawn of the 20th century, the discipline of social psychology typically explains human behaviour as a result of the interaction of mental states and immediate social situations (Spencer & Myers, 2006). In the words of E. Arosen (1972), “social psychology is the study of the manner in which human being thinks, feels, and behaves in social situation”. Godon Allport (1954) similarly described it as a “discipline that attempts to understand how the thought, feeling and behaviour of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of other human beings”. Myers and Spencer (Spencer & Myers, 2006), in their turn, define social psychology as the “scientific study of how people think about, influence,

and relate to one another”. Barron and Byrne defined social psychology as “the scientific field that seeks to understand the nature and cause of individual behaviour and thought in social situations” (Baron et al., 2006). Hence, social psychologists perceive much of the human behaviour as both a response and a stimulus to the behaviour of others. What a person does is at least determined in part- and often to a great extent – by what other people are doing or what he thinks they expect him to do. At the same time, what he does help in determining what others do. Essentially, the discipline of social psychology studies how people influence and are influenced by other people (Mehrad, 2023). As a discipline which studies how social relationships influence and modulate people’s personality, thoughts, characteristics and behaviour, Auggie has displayed perfectly the way the treatment of other has engendered and inserted a deep and poor mental health, psychological illness and very low social status (ibid).

Hiding a profound stigmatization, filled with a deep feeling of shame and discomfort, the term stigma was introduced into social psychology in 1963. Indeed, as a powerful phenomenon with far-ranging effects on its targets, Stigma is an attribute or characteristic that marks a person as different from others and that extensively discredits his or her identity. Ancient Greeks coined the term stigma to describe a mark cut or burned into the body that designated the bearer as someone who was morally defective, such as a slave, criminal, or traitor (Encyclopedia.com). However, the roots of contemporary perspectives on stigma can be traced to Erving Goffman’s (1963) classic book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity*. In fact, the scholar resurrected the term, defining stigma as an attribute that spoils a person's identity, reducing him or her in others' minds “from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). Goffman states that "a special attribute that produces in others a wide discredit” arguing that "a public stigma relegates the person who possesses it to a stigmatized role as opposed to the normal” (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). Goffman argues that the phenomenon of stigmatization is the fact of being rejected, devalued and considered inferior by society. Individuals might be attacked, insulted, demeaned and mistreated because they have physical and mental defects or because of their ethnic origins, religious and racial belongings. That what indeed deteriorates the self-esteem, social and personal identity of the person being stigmatized; a perfect showcase of Auggie in a society where being accepted was hard.

Occurring when a person possesses or is believed to possess “some attribute or characteristic that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context” (Crocker et al., 1998), people who are stigmatized possess an attribute which marks them as different and leads them to

be underestimated in the eyes of others. Visible or invisible, the stigmatizing marks might be controllable or uncontrollable, and linked to behaviour, group membership or appearance as the physical deformity in the case of Auggie. In stigmatization, marks become associated with negative evaluations and stereotypes. “These stereotypes and evaluations are generally widely shared and well known among members of a culture, and they become a basis for excluding or avoiding members of the stereotyped category” (ibid).

As a matter of fact, most stigma scholars regard stigma as a social construction; an attribute attached to society. Thus, when social stigma occurs as the rejection of, or discrimination against, a person based on certain social characteristics that serve to place them as ‘the other’ in a society, every "different" person can be stigmatized, due to innate characteristics such as mental disorders, deformity, obesity, skin colour, or religion, crime, unemployment, poverty and many other characteristic that no one has the opportunity to choose. The stigma of physical and mental illness affects not only stigmatized sick people, but also their entire family and environment. When the disease touches a family member, each member of the family is affected by seeing his father or brother suffer from the disease and also by seeing how he is seen, despised and rejected by society. This sometimes causes a sense of guilt; a sense of being responsible for the child’s illness because of hereditary factors for example. Inadvertently, the stigmatized person’s family develops a feeling of overprotection to avoid any psychic harm, and that helps perpetuate the stigma.

Leading to a negative state of well-being, the stigmatized person does feel worthless, marginalized, loses his self-esteem, isolates himself from society and suffers from depression, sadness and anxiety. Consequently, social stigma can be transformed into self-stigma; another component of the broader social phenomenon known as stigmatization. As a set of prejudices (stigma) that are internalized, thus becoming identity attributes, the person under discrimination believes them and makes them his. Since his very first day of school, Auggie has suffered from social stigma which automatically engendered low self-esteem and an intuitive sensation of worthlessness and ineptitude. Certainly, Stigma, prejudice and discrimination against people with mental illness can be subtle or it can be obvious. But no matter the magnitude, it automatically leads to harm. People with mental illness are marginalized and discriminated in numerous manner. Understanding what that looks like and how to address a disabled person can be of great help; the power of words can have an immense impact on a child such Auggie.

## **6. The Power of Words**

Words, these daily uttered expressions for the purpose of conveying meaning and transferring beliefs, do possess a tremendous value and a great impact on the human being. In every single prospect, words forge man's personality, memory and ability to perceive the world. If words highly impact adults, then what about children! Indeed, the power of words in the self-esteem of children is enormous. Parents try to educate their children in the best possible way, teach them, buy them what they want, give them their love and time and when necessary become very tough in the name of education. After every nonsense, school report or any other inappropriate behaviour, parents punish, yell and scold their children to be better people without knowing that their words destroy their children's self-esteem forever. "What a fool you are", "fearful", "you look like a giant whale", "you will never get there" are all expressions parents foreground to their children or other adults to children in a spontaneous manner to joke or motivate them to be brave, disciplined or responsible. Evaluated as efficient and encouraging, such words do nothing but convince the child that he is good for nothing.

Displaying the way words carry heavy meaning is done throughout *Wonder* (2017). At an age of a very fragile growing process, August Pullman demonstrates that as a disabled person, every word that comes out of the mouth of his peers affects his personality and the way he perceives himself. In fact, words with emotional content are processed in specific areas of the brain; areas quite different from those used to process words without emotional content. The more such words are said or heard, the more that area of the brain is used and, therefore, the more the neural networks of it are consolidated. In other words, it is very important to know that a negative or insulting word activates the amygdala, a brain structure which is linked to alerts and which generates a feeling of discomfort, anxiety or anger. In the case of Auggie, from listening to negative words and adjectives, he accepted and became persuaded that what his friends are saying, what the society is claiming and what his entire community is thinking of him is certainly true. Hurt and offended, Auggie over time has developed self-stigma, lost himself, became insecure, and lost his confidence and deep feeling of growing up just like any other normal kid.

Accordingly, such impressions might be altered only when replaced by positive words. As the brain's reaction is heightened when it hears positive words, positive expressions are assimilated by the right hemisphere of the brain, which is that of emotions. Therefore, pleasure, joy, confidence and delight are generated. When confidence is lost, there is an automatic surge of isolation,

shyness, feelings of inferiority and problems in relating to society. The child is afraid of what they will say and think of him and involuntarily, feels responsible and sometimes guilty of everything negative that can happen at home or at school. Thus, the labels are very easy to put on and very difficult to eliminate, they creep and remain for life.

Throughout *Wonder*, August reminds the human being of the aggression and violence which surrounds him. Regarded as an integral part of human nature, the verbal aggression and physical assault addressed to Auggie are intentional inflictions of some form of harm that denote the unawareness of his community of the hard times he is going through. It is a portrait of the fact that the human being is born social, and is programmed to relate with others. Since childhood, the child responds to the sound of the human voice by turning his head and gradually begins to interact with children of his age starting with the exchange of games and ending with an infinite love. With friends, the child learns to be kind, to respect opinions, to appreciate the differences that exist between each one, to share, to give his love and to worry about other people. Feeling accepted by friends increases the feeling of self-esteem, security and self-confidence. Proved and validated scientifically, friendship promotes good mental and physical health and emotionally helps children socialize and create lasting affective relationships.

## **7. Conclusion**

Inspired by a real life story, R.J. Palacio's *Wonder* recounts the story of Auggie, a courageous, sweet 10 years old boy born with distorted facial features. Diagnosed by the Treacher Collins Syndrome, Palacio voiced out in the writing the difficulty of being different; she in fact portrayed harsh realities disabled people encounter in their everyday lives. Throughout *Wonder*, Pullman, the author has managed to unveil the insecurities, shame, over anxiousness and gloominess children like Auggie have to mutedly bare throughout their journey. With an emotional pencil, R.J. Palacio has been able to add a touch of laughter at times and make tears escape in others. Hurt with a word or a look, *Wonder* or in another sense, August's lessons, remind the readers of the important impact words have on the environment.

When *Wonder* migrated to the screen and was initially released in 2017, another dimension was given to the story. Staring Jacob Tremblay as the main character, August "Auggie" Pullman, along with Julia Roberts and Owen Wilson as his parents, the family drama won over millions of fans. Throughout the elevated cinematic techniques, Auggie's experience in school was better depicted as viewers had the ability to see, feel and greatly relate to the actors. Just like the novel,

Auggie's experience in school reflect motifs related to friendship, aggression and the impact of words and the importance of kindness.

In *Wonder* (2017), and in using a socio-psychological approach to analysing the movie, Auggie's storyline has been a true mirror of a hidden and internalized stigmatization. A social stigma which engendered an automatic feeling of alienation, rejection, shame and negative beliefs about oneself. Born different, Auggie's journey is a reflector of the importance of words; a great reminder of the grand value of choosing the right word in order to avoid verbal aggression and underestimation, and promote kindness, self-esteem and confidence for children like August Pullman.

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