Between Text and Screen
Dis-mediating Disability in *Out of My Mind*

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Abstract

This article examines the representation of disability in literature and film, drawing on Sharon M. Draper's novel *Out of My Mind* (2010) and its 2024 Disney film adaptation, directed by Amber Sealey. Drawing on disability studies and adaptation theory, the study examines how dis-mediation disrupts conventional ways in which 'disability' is framed by narrative and media. Draper's novel employs first-person narration to give Melody, an eleven-year-old girl with cerebral palsy, a powerful inner voice that overturns the assumptions of those around her. The film, however, tends to rely on cinematic strategies such as voice-over, framing, and sound design to convey her subjectivity, raising the question of whether these devices capture or dilute the complexity of her interior world. By placing the novel and film side by side, the article argues that *Out of My Mind* demonstrates both the strengths and limitations of different media in conveying the experience of disability.

*Keywords***:** Dis-mediation, Disability Studies, Adaptation, Ableism, Stereotype

4.0 Introduction

The challenge of representing disability[1] across media is both an aesthetic and an ethical concern. Literature and films that centre on disabled protagonists face the delicate task of portraying these characters with authenticity, ensuring that their voices and subjective experiences are respected and accurately depicted. Such narratives often navigate questions of voice, subjectivity, and cultural perception, all while resisting the risk of reducing disability to

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stereotype or spectacle. Historically, representations of disability in media have frequently marginalised disabled voices, often reinforcing notions of limitation, tragedy, or otherness. These portrayals reflect broader societal biases informed by cultural norms that emphasise a presumed standard or norm of physical and cognitive ability. In recent years, texts like Sharon M. Draper's *Out of My Mind* (2010) and its 2024 Disney adaptation directed by Amber Sealey offer promising examples of narratives that challenge these dominant frameworks. They foreground the interiority and complexity of disabled characters, providing a more ethical and nuanced depiction that resists simplistic or stereotypical portrayals. Both versions narrate the life of Melody Brooks, an eleven-year-old girl with cerebral palsy whose inability to speak conceals her extraordinary intelligence. This dual media representation offers an important case study for exploring how disability is framed and reimagined across different platforms. While the novel and film share the same central narrative, the way they mediate Melody's subjectivity and, by extension, themselves differ significantly.

Drawing extensively on frameworks derived from Disability Studies and Adaptation Theory, this study employs the critical concept of dis-mediation to interrogate conventional ways in which disability is mediated and represented. Dis-mediation refers to the process by which traditional modes of disabled representation, often rooted in ableist[2] assumptions and stereotypes, are disrupted and restructured. It foregrounds the shift from portraying disability as a deficit or inspiration toward recognising it as an embodied identity with inherent agency and complexity. Rather than focusing solely on how each version remediates the other, this approach examines how both disrupt the normative mediation of disability.

Draper's novel enacts dis-mediation by granting Melody a first-person voice that unsettles ableist presumptions of voicelessness. Conversely, Sealey's film adaptation necessarily negotiates the representational possibilities and constraints of the cinematic medium, using cinematic strategies such as voice-over narration, framing, and sound design to convey Melody's interiority. However, these devices provoke critical reflection on whether film, which is privileged for its visual immediacy, can fully encapsulate the depth and continuity of experience afforded by literary narrative voice. This inquiry is significant within the interdisciplinary space of Disability Studies, which has long challenged representations that marginalise or silence disabled voices, both figuratively and literally. The seminal concept of "narrative prosthesis" (2000) articulated by Mitchell and Snyder illustrates how disability is frequently mobilised as an external device to advance plot or moral lesson rather than reflecting disabled individuals' actual experiences. Draper's novel offers a counterpoint by recentering agency, using Melody's voice to dismantle common tropes that situate disabled characters as pitiable or heroic objects rather than full subjects. Complementing this critical disability framework, Adaptation Theory and Media Studies provide tools to understand how stories shift when transported between narrative forms. Traditional approaches in adaptation studies, particularly those informed by Linda Hutcheon's (2013) notion of adaptation as both a product and a process, emphasise how stories evolve as they move across media. Similarly, Bolter and Grusin's (1999) concept of remediation suggests that new media forms continually refashion older ones, drawing attention to their representational processes. However, when applied to disability narratives, these frameworks may prove insufficient. They tend to privilege formal transformation over ethical or cultural critique, often overlooking how representational choices reinforce or resist social assumptions about disability (Mitchell & Snyder 2000).

The figure of Melody Brooks and her narrative in *Out of My Mind* offers a particularly rich site for exploring these tensions. Her cerebral palsy, which limits her speech and motor functions, situates her at the margins of normative ableist society, yet Draper's narrative

disrupts this margin by showcasing her intellectual brilliance and emotional depth. The novel's use of first-person narration is a political act of resistance to dominant discourses that equate silence and disability with absence or inferiority. This resists narrative prosthesis by asserting Melody's complete subjectivity, challenging social constructs that have historically relegated disabled persons to the periphery. The film's adaptation of Melody's story retains many of these subversive aims but confronts the difficulties inherent in translating an interior, verbal narrative into a visual medium. Strategies such as the use of voice-over narration strive to maintain Melody's subjective voice; the framing and camera work emphasise her embodied point of view, inviting viewers to inhabit her perspective visually and aurally. Still, the fragmentary nature of cinematic interiority and the risk of sentimentalising or oversimplifying complex inner experiences indicate the complexities of dis-mediating disability through film.

Analysing both the novel and film through the dual lens of dis-mediation and adaptation invites broader reflections on how media shape and reshape social understandings of disability. Media do not passively carry stories but actively participate in the politics of empathy, visibility, and agency; they negotiate cultural attitudes towards difference and subjecthood. Moreover, the theme of assistive technologies in the novel and film, as embodied by Melody's Medi-talker, highlights the ambivalence surrounding technology's role in disability. On one hand, technology offers vital access and agency; on the other hand, it risks reaffirming ableist notions that value normalised modes of communication and cognition. Draper and Sealey explore these tensions thoughtfully, foregrounding the relational and contextual nature of technology in the lives of disabled people. By situating the text and film side by side, this study highlights key divergences and convergences that illuminate both the radical potential and the inherent limitations of various media frameworks in conveying disability authentically. Through the lens of dis-mediation, disability ceases to be a metaphorical or symbolic narrative device and instead emerges as a lived, dynamic identity that is continually negotiated, contested, and re-envisioned.

4.1 Literature Review

Disability Studies has critically examined the cultural and literary marginalisation of disabled voices, highlighting how disability is often rendered metaphorically or symbolically rather than as an embodied lived experience. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder's (2000) influential concept of 'narrative prosthesis' argues that disability has often been used as a metaphorical device to propel plot rather than to represent lived experience. According to them, disabled characters frequently serve as symbols of moral instruction or tragedy, reducing disability to a metaphor for human limitation. Lennard J. Davis (1995) in *The Disability Studies Reader* extends this critique by locating the origins of such representations in the cultural obsession with 'normalcy'. He argues that the construction of the 'normate' body, what society perceives as standard, renders non-normative bodies invisible or inferior. This concept invites critical attention to how narratives perpetuate social hierarchies and the tyranny of the norm, which shape the dominant understanding of disability.

Complementing this framework, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's theorisation of the normal body in *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997) addresses how societal ideals of normalcy exclude and stigmatise non-normative bodies, thereby shaping the boundaries of legitimate representation. Garland-Thomson's insights highlight the need to interrogate cultural narratives that perpetuate exclusion by upholding the norm as the standard measure of value and ability.

Ato Quayson (2007), in *Aesthetic Nervousness*, deepens the theoretical conversation by illustrating how representations of disability create tension between empathy and discomfort, compelling audiences to question their own normative assumptions. Similarly, Tobin Siebers (2008) frames disability as a form of embodied knowledge that contests traditional aesthetics and calls for a redefinition of beauty, agency, and value.

Within adaptation theory, Linda Hutcheon (2013) conceptualises adaptation as both a product and a process that reinterprets existing narratives according to new cultural and media contexts. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999) expand on this through the concept of *remediation*, which posits that new media forms continually refashion older ones while drawing attention to their own mediating structures. Yet these theories often prioritise formal transformation, leaving questions of identity, embodiment, and social ethics underexplored. As Mitchell and Snyder (2015) observe in *The Biopolitics of Disability*, representations of disability are inseparable from social and political power relations. Any analysis that overlooks the cultural meanings of embodiment risks replicating the same exclusions it seeks to study.

Recent scholarship has begun to address this gap by connecting Disability Studies and media theory. Works by Shildrick (2012) and Ellcessor (2016) argue for a more intersectional understanding of disability representation, emphasising that media form itself contributes to how disability is experienced and understood. These perspectives open the possibility of examining adaptation not only as a narrative shift but also as an ethical and perceptual transformation.

Building on these discussions, the concept of 'dis-mediation'[3], derived from Bolter and Grusin's (1999) remediation, has been proposed to describe processes that interrupt normative mediation. In the context of disability representation, dis-mediation challenges the cultural filters through which disabled experience is framed for non-disabled audiences. It calls attention to how both language and image participate in constructing or dismantling ableist perspectives.

The Inclusive Education Planning Review (2019) applauds Draper's intention to promote inclusion but warns that classroom readings should avoid simplifying the narrative into a story of inspiration. The review stresses that teachers and readers must also reflect on systematic barriers faced by disabled students rather than viewing Melody's triumph solely as a personal victory. In *The Disability Library Reflection* (2018), the reviewer highlights how Draper's use of first-person narration powerfully humanises Melody, allowing readers to experience frustration, brilliance, and isolation from her point of view. According to *The Guardian* (2014), the novel is both "powerful and thought-provoking," revealing how society often underestimates individuals with disabilities simply because their voices are unheard. Draper has been praised for her ability to make Melody's inner world "vivid and full of humor and hope," turning what could have been a story of pity into one of empowerment.

4.1 Research Gap and Justification

While the existing scholarship in Disability Studies and adaptation theory provides critical insights into the ethics of representation, few studies have examined how disability is negotiated across literary and cinematic forms simultaneously. Most discussions either privilege the textual construction of disability or focus on visual representation in film, rarely addressing how both media can collaboratively or divergently construct subjectivity.

Furthermore, the intersection between dis-mediation and adaptation remains underexplored in current research.

This study addresses that gap by analysing Sharon M. Draper's *Out of My Mind* (2010) and Amber Sealey's 2024 adaptation through the dual frameworks of adaptation theory and dis-mediation. It differs from earlier scholarship by focusing not only on the representational ethics of disability but also on the aesthetic and sensory mechanisms through which voice, embodiment, and interiority are mediated. By juxtaposing the novel's narrative strategies with the film's cinematic techniques, this research demonstrates how dis-mediation reframes disability as an active mode of expression rather than a deficit, thereby contributing to an interdisciplinary understanding of how narrative and media negotiate the politics of inclusion and recognition.

4.3 The Text

Sharon M. Draper's *Out of My Mind* was published in 2010 and was selected as the winner of the 2013 Sasquatch Reading Award by the readers of Washington State and the 2013 Bluestem Award by the third through fifth graders of Illinois. It has also won the 2013 California Young Reader Medal and the 2013 Nevada Young Readers Award. In the novel, the main character, Melody, is born with cerebral palsy, which is a condition marked by impaired muscle coordination and other disabilities, typically caused by damage to the brain before or at birth. Despite her inability to speak or communicate with people around her, the story is narrated through Melody's perspective, using her own words to communicate her thoughts and identity in a world where she cannot express herself. It is revealed at the end of the novel that the reason why Melody has been able to narrate her story and speak her own words is that the novel is actually Melody's own autobiography, where her assistant helped her type it as she used a communicative device to express herself.

The story explores Melody's struggles with communication and inclusion within her school and community. Her discovery of a Medi-Talker, a device that enables her to express herself, marks a significant turning point, allowing her to participate more fully in educational and social activities. However, Melody faced persistent exclusion, prejudice, and misunderstanding, exemplified by her being left out of a school quiz competition, which underscores the systematic barriers faced by individuals with disabilities. Throughout the novel, Draper challenges common stereotypes and misconceptions about disability, portraying Melody as a complex, intelligent, and resilient individual. Themes of empowerment, the politics of disability, family dynamics, and the quest for recognition and equality are woven throughout the narrative. The novel ultimately emphasises the importance of hearing and respecting disabled voices and critiques the ableist structures that limit access and opportunity. Amber Sealey's 2024 Disney adaptation remains largely faithful to Draper's narrative, depicting Melody's world through visual and auditory techniques that translate her consciousness to the screen. The film uses voice-over narration, framing, and sound design to approximate the novel's interior monologue. Notably, it includes scenes that emphasise Melody's physical perspective and introduces subtle variations, such as extended family interactions and classroom sequences, to enrich visual storytelling. By maintaining the essence of Melody's story while adapting it to cinematic form, the film provides an accessible interpretation of Draper's portrayal of voice, agency, and recognition.

4.4 Analysis and Discussion

4. 4.1 Consciousness and Subjectivity in Out of My Mind

Sharon M. Draper's *Out of My Mind* (2010) enacts dis-mediation by placing Melody Brooks's consciousness at the centre of narrative experience, dismantling the long-standing literary tradition of treating disability as symbolic or supplementary. Her narrative voice directly contests the ableist assumption that silence implies a lack of thought, establishing instead a subjectivity defined by perception, humour, and reflection. Amber Sealey's 2024 Disney adaptation translates this resistant literary strategy into film, using performance, sound, and framing to render Melody's perspective on screen. A comparison of these parallel techniques reveals how each medium enacts and occasionally struggles with the work of dis-mediation.

4.4.2 Melody's Consciousness: Enacting Dis-mediation

The novel opens with one of the clearest enactments of dis-mediation in contemporary young adult fiction. By situating the reader within Melody's interior monologue, Draper disrupts what Mitchell and Snyder (2000) describe as 'narrative prosthesis', the literary habit of using disability as a device to advance moral or emotional development. Melody's declaration, "I'm ridiculously smart, and I'm pretty sure I have a photographic memory" (Draper 2010: 13), reframes her impairment not as a deficit but as an epistemic difference: a mind capable of vast cognitive activity constrained by an ableist communicative world. The sensory richness of her description in her mind, "like a video camera always recording" (ibid.) positions her voice as the novel's primary medium of resistance.

This strategy of sustained interior narration aligns with Garland-Thomson's (2000) and Siebers's (2008) call to reimagine disabled embodiment as a form of knowledge rather than absence. Draper's first-person narration thus performs what might be termed literary dis-mediation as it dismantles narrative hierarchies that historically render disabled characters mute or metaphorical, giving Melody control over the lens through which her world is seen.

Sealey's (2024) film adaptation attempts to transpose this narrative resistance into visual form. The opening sequence mirrors Draper's structure: Melody's voice-over cuts through the ambient noise of the classroom, asserting cognitive clarity amid social chaos. Around the 00:08:30 mark, Sealey juxtaposes her calm internal narration with external images of stillness and silence, turning sound itself into a mode of critique. As Hutcheon (2013) observes, adaptation involves not imitation but re-creation across media; Sealey's strategy exemplifies this by translating verbal interiority into audiovisual experience.

However, the limitations of cinematic representation become evident, as Draper's novel continuously employs interior narration, whereas sustains interior narration, whereas Sealey's film adaptation relies on selective voice-over, compelling the viewers to interpret Melody's inner subjectivity through non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, camera movements, and mise-en-scène. At times, this silence risks reinstating the passivity that Draper's prose resists. This tension highlights how cinema, as Bolter and Grusin (1999) suggest, "remediates" rather than replicates prior media as it makes visible the boundaries of expression inherent in each form. To compensate, Sealey employs other aesthetic strategies. Subjective camerawork consistently situates the audience at Melody's seated eye level, forcing identification rather than voyeurism. The sound design isolates Melody's perception, reducing background chatter

to convey both exclusion and sensory precision. These techniques approximate Draper's narrative interiority but cannot fully reproduce the wit, irony, and analytical intelligence of Melody's textual consciousness. Yet, the film's reliance on embodiment, on showing rather than telling, constitutes its own form of dis-mediation, as it insists on the visibility of a consciousness historically confined to metaphor.

Ultimately, this comparison underscores both the power and the constraint of form. Draper achieves resistance through uninterrupted linguistic interiority; Sealey achieves it through spatial and auditory immersion. Both texts refuse to present disability as a deficit, instead reconstructing it as embodied intellect. Dis-mediation thus emerges not as a fixed concept but as an ongoing negotiation across narrative and cinematic media. Critics have also acknowledged the film's attempt to retain Melody's interiority through visual and auditory cues. [4]*Flickering Myth* (2024) praised Sealey's "delicate balance between restraint and emotional depth," noting that the film "captures the essence of Melody's consciousness without resorting to sentimentality." Yet other reviewers perceived the adaptation as overly sentimental. *Punch Drunk Critics* (2024) argued that despite its powerful performances, the film "occasionally leans on emotional excess," illustrating the persistent tension between authentic representation and inspirational framing in disability cinema.

4.4.3 Mediated Embodiment and the Politics of Access

In the cultural imagination, assistive technologies often occupy a paradoxical space. Devices such as wheelchairs, prosthetics, and communication aids are celebrated as instruments that "overcome" disability, yet they also risk reinforcing the notion that disabled lives require technological correction. Critical Disability Studies challenges this binary, contending that such tools do not cure or erase disability but expose how environments and social attitudes, rather than bodies, produce exclusion (Oliver 1990 and Siebers 2008). In *Out of My Mind* (2010) and its 2024 film adaptation, Sharon M. Draper and Amber Sealey resist treating assistive devices as miraculous solutions. Instead, both portray the wheelchair and the Medi-Talker as ordinary yet politically charged instruments that enable access while revealing the cultural filters through which ability and agency are perceived.

4.4.3.1 The Wheelchair and Social Perception

In both novel and film, the wheelchair becomes a site of agency and contested perception rather than confinement. Historically, wheelchairs in literature and cinema have functioned as what Mitchell and Snyder (2000) call 'narrative prosthesis', a shorthand for limitation or tragedy that propels plot. Draper overturns this convention by allowing Melody to narrate her relationship with her powered chair in her own voice: "When I got my first powered wheelchair, I felt like I'd just been given a set of wings" (Draper 2010: 70). The metaphor of wings inverts the ableist assumption that mobility devices restrict life; instead, it signifies freedom, independence, and creative movement. This reversal epitomises dis-mediation, the dismantling of representational filters that define disability as deficiency.

Yet Melody remains acutely aware of how others perceive her chair. She observes, "People look at my chair and see a disability. They don't look at me and see a person" (Draper 2010: 42). This insight reveals disability as a social construction: the barrier lies not in the chair but in the gaze that interprets it. Draper's narrative voice thus exposes the politics of perception, positioning Melody as a commentator on her own embodiment.

Sealey reinforces this critique through cinematic technique. At approximately 00:12:40, the camera situates Melody at the margins of her classroom, her wheelchair delineating social space. Later, at 00:31:00, low-angle shots align the viewer with her seated perspective, forcing audiences to inhabit her physical vantage point. By placing the camera at Melody's eye level, Sealey enacts a visual form of dis-mediation that compels identification rather than pity. However, without the novel's witty internal commentary, these scenes risk reinforcing the external gaze they seek to challenge; viewers see how others see her but not always how she interprets them. Both Draper and Sealey resist sentimentality, yet the comparison underscores a key tension between literary introspection and cinematic exteriority between being heard and being seen.

4.4.3.2 The Medi-Talker: Voice, Authenticity, and Recognition

If the wheelchair reconfigures mobility, the Medi-Talker transforms assumptions about voice and cognition. In much disability representation, assistive technologies function as 'narrative prosthesis' devices that symbolically "fix" disability to achieve closure. Draper rejects this trope. Melody insists that the Medi-Talker neither cures her cerebral palsy nor grants new intelligence: "They think the computer is smart, not me" (Draper 2010: 138). Her reflection exposes how mediated communication is often judged as less authentic than speech, revealing society's narrow valuation of oral language as the only legitimate marker of intellect.

Sealey's adaptation visualises this moment with both intensity and restraint. In the pivotal classroom scene (00:48:00), Melody first uses the Medi-Talker amid hushed astonishment from teachers and peers. Although the swelling score initially risks framing the event as spectacle, Sealey counters this by lingering on Melody's calm expression as the synthesised voice emerges. The focus of her gaze anchors technological mediation in embodied control. The scene enacts dis-mediation by reframing technology not as a miraculous transformation but as an extension of agency.

The difference between text and film lies in emphasis. Draper integrates the Medi-Talker into Melody's identity device, articulating intelligence already present, whereas the film tends toward revelation, depicting the public "proof" of her brilliance. This contrast reflects what Siebers (2008) terms the 'aesthetics of dependency', in which social validation depends on technological visibility. Still, Sealey resists complete capitulation to this trope: the film's restrained conclusion underscores Melody's composure rather than collective awe.

Together, Draper and Sealey demonstrate that assistive technologies are not symbols of cure but catalysts for recognition. The wheelchair and Medi-Talker function as sites of dis-mediation, exposing how meaning and access are shaped through interaction rather than invention. By centring technology within lived experience, both works transform cultural tools into instruments of self-representation and critique.

4.5 Structural Barriers and Fragile Inclusion

One of the most powerful aspects of the narration lies in how the novel and the film portray both the intimacy of family relationships and the brutality of systemic exclusion. Draper and Sealey reject the sentimental narrative of triumph, choosing instead to reveal how moments of inclusion remain precarious within systems that privilege able-bodied norms. This focus aligns

with Oliver's (1990) 'social model of disability', which locates oppression in social organisation rather than impairment. It also extends Garland-Thomson's (2000) argument that representation itself can either reinforce or resist the "normate" gaze, the imagined ideal of physical and cognitive normalcy.

4.5.1 Systemic Injustice: The Whiz Kids Exclusion

The Whiz Kids competition sequence embodies the social mechanisms that marginalise disabled individuals even in spaces that claim inclusion. Draper's narration captures this with striking restraint: "They didn't even call me. They just left me out" (Draper 2010: 268). The absence of emotional commentary or melodrama enacts dis-mediation by refusing to transform discrimination into a moment of redemption or pity. Instead, the text presents exclusion as an everyday reality, implicating readers in the ordinariness of systemic bias.

This approach contrasts with earlier literary models of disability that, as Mitchell and Snyder (2000) note, often resolve exclusion through moral enlightenment or narrative closure. Draper's refusal of closure is political as it forces readers to confront the continuity of injustice. The narrative does not repair social failure; it exposes it.

Sealey translates this textual restraint into cinematic form through silence and framing. Around the 01:07:00 mark, as Melody's classmates board the bus without her, the camera lingers on the empty seat she was meant to occupy. The surrounding sound fades until only environmental noise remains cinematic enactment of isolation. The visual economy recalls what Siebers (2008) calls the 'aesthetics of disability realism', portraying the representation of exclusion not through spectacle but through the persistence of absence. By withholding music or dialogue, Sealey extends Draper's act of dis-mediation from page to screen, transforming silence into critique.

Both versions reveal the limits of institutional inclusion, suggesting that representation alone cannot dismantle structural prejudice. Instead, they model an ethics of witnessing, to look and listen differently to absence, exclusion, and silence as political experiences rather than narrative failures. Moreover, *The Wheelchair Activist* (2024) highlights that Sealey's film extended its politics of inclusion beyond narrative content by involving disability consultants throughout production, embodying dis-mediation as both form and practice.

4.5.2 Family Dynamics: Resisting Sentimentality

In both novel and film, family becomes a site where inclusion and fragility coexist. Draper resists the sentimental trope of the heroic caregiver or the inspirational family that "overcomes" adversity. Her portrayal of Melody's mother and father is tender but unidealised; they experience frustration, guilt, and love in equal measure. The relationship with her younger sister Penny complicates these dynamics further, capturing the emotional ambivalence of affection, rivalry, and protection. This multidimensional portrayal resonates with Ruddick's (1990) concept of 'maternal thinking', in which care is an ethical and intellectual practice rather than a moral sacrifice.

Sealey's adaptation preserves this emotional texture through gesture and visual rhythm rather than dialogue. Around 00:22:30, a quiet domestic scene shows Melody's parents debating her educational inclusion in an intimate yet tense exchange that balances advocacy with exhaustion. Later, at 00:48:00, a tender moment between Melody and Penny conveys both

playfulness and dependence without sentimentality. The use of natural light and minimal score grounds these scenes in realism, avoiding what Garland-Thomson (2000) identifies as the "aesthetic of uplift" that often frames disability narratives.

Through these portrayals, both Draper and Sealey perform dis-mediation in relational terms. The family, like the institution, becomes a space of negotiation rather than redemption. Love is not portrayed as the solution to structural barriers but as a fragile, evolving response to them. In doing so, both works redefine inclusion as a process of ethical engagement rather than a state of resolution.

Together, the novel and film reveal that inclusion is never secure but contingent, constantly shaped by social institutions, familial negotiations, and representational ethics. The Whiz Kids exclusion and the family's emotional realism exemplify how dis-mediation functions not merely as an artistic device but as a critique of social and cinematic norms. Draper and Sealey compel audiences to recognise that representation is itself an act of power: it can either reproduce exclusion or expose the fragility of belonging.

4.6 Conclusion

By reading *Out of My Mind* through the framework of dis-mediation, both Sharon M. Draper's novel and Amber Sealey's film adaptation emerge as critical interventions in the cultural politics of disability representation. The novel enacts dis-mediation most forcefully through Melody Brooks's first-person narration, which refuses to let her subjectivity be filtered through able-bodied perception. Her consciousness drives the narrative, dismantling stereotypes that equate silence with absence. Sealey's adaptation, while operating within the constraints of visual and auditory media, translates this resistant strategy through voice-over narration, subjective framing, and the authentic casting of Phoebe-Rae Taylor. These aesthetic choices collectively disrupt the ableist impulse to 'correct' or sentimentalise disability, ensuring that Melody's agency remains at the narrative centre.

Both the novel and film resist the cultural compulsion to resolve disability narratives through cure, pity, or triumph. Instead, they foreground systemic barriers such as social prejudice, institutional neglect, and the fragility of recognition as the true disabling forces. Key sites, such as the use of assistive technologies, the dynamics of mainstream education, familial relationships, and the Whiz Kids exclusion, reveal that disability is not a private tragedy but a political identity produced through social and structural exclusion. Draper's narrative voice critiques ableism through wit and precision, while Sealey's visual language renders those same tensions perceptible for broader audiences, even as it occasionally risks lapsing into sentimentality.

Together, the novel and its adaptation enact dis-mediation by refusing 'narrative prosthesis'. The representational tendency to use disability as a metaphor or plot device, and by insisting on disability as a lived experience and epistemic standpoint. Their strategies extend the social model of disability (Oliver, 1990) and the aesthetics of realism articulated by Siebers (2008), foregrounding disabled subjectivity as integral to ethical storytelling.

Ultimately, this study contributes to adaptation and disability studies by examining how dis-mediation operates across textual and cinematic forms. In both children's literature and

film, *Out of My Mind* dismantles the cultural frames of normalcy and pity, reimagining disability not as a deficit but as diversity. Draper and Sealey's works affirm that the purpose of disability narratives is neither to inspire nor console but to demand recognition, equity, and justice. In this sense, dis-mediation functions not merely as a theoretical lens but as an ethical and aesthetic practice, a call to unlearn the ways of seeing that render some bodies invisible and others ideal.

Endnotes

1. The term 'disability' has been historically associated with negative connotations due to its focus on limitations rather than abilities. However, within Disability Studies and related fields, it remains a widely accepted and critical term for discussing societal, cultural, and structural barriers faced by people with impairments.
2. It involves systematic practices and beliefs that consider disability as a defect or flaw and often reinforces segregation, exclusion, or inequality for disabled individuals (Campbell 2009).
3. The term "dis-mediation" adopts Bolter and Grusin's (1999) notion of "remediation." It refers to the deliberate interruption of conventional representational channels that frame disability through ableist or normative filters. In this study, dis-mediation denotes the aesthetic and ethical strategies that foreground disabled subjectivity by unsettling these dominant mediations.
4. While this section draws on academic theories of dismediation and disability representation, it also references selected critical reviews and advocacy sources such as *Flickering Myth* (2024), *Punch Drunk Critics* (2024) and *The Wheelchair Activist* (2024). These are included not as scholarly authorities but as indicators of the film's reception and the broader cultural discourse surrounding disability and inclusion in contemporary media.

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