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Identification Acceptance for the Mentally Disabled

During the 1960s it was not uncommon to see the mistreatment of the mentally ill in fact those with disabilities or mental illness only started getting the proper necessities and rights they needed in the late 70s. "Flowers for Algernon" a fictional short novel by Daniel Keyes stars Charlie Gordon as the main protagonist who has suffered from a learning disability for the 37 years that he's had to live through. Charlie endures the downsides of having a learning disability but a motivation or "motorvation" as Charlie likes to phrase it, is his determination to become smarter. A trait that shines through and identifies Charlie besides his constant determination is the fact that he's an opportunist, so when he gets the chance to become intelligent he goes through a risky operation that even Dr. Strauss and Dr. Nemur were unsure whether would actually succeed in modifying his intelligence. Eventually the operation shows results of success through Charlie but not immediately just as it did in Algernon the mouse. Soon after Charlie sets into his new span of knowledge given by the surgery, he surpasses Dr. Strauss, *the doctor who performed the surgery on him*. Although everything seems like a new turn of the events things end up turning for the worst instead after his parallel Algernon dies and it's clear to Charlie and the rest of the characters that Charlie will soon die as well. Identity is well explored throughout

the text in 3 ways those being: Charlie's motivation, his constant crave of wanting to be accepted and up to standards, and how Charlie treats himself as well as how other treat him.

Charlie's motivation to become intelligent might seem like something that could positively affect him but as a matter a fact it ends up affecting him in the exact opposite way . Generally speaking Charlie's motivation to become smart is a reasonable motivation and goal considering his conditions but the way he carried out this motivation was what lead to his own self destruction and identity destruction. Although Charlie believed what he was slowly turning and doing to himself was morally right he never took into account of what could go wrong. This can be seen when Charlie states he's scared a tad but is okay as long as he's smart for a while: "They dont know if it will be perminint but theirs a chance. Thats why I said ok even when I was scared because she said it was an operashun" (287). Of course this is at the beginning of the story when Charlie is trapped in a childlike state of thinking and this is due to his disability but at the same time this way of thinking puts him at a disadvantage since he is not fully aware of his own choices that eventually lead him to set off a series of events including his prophesied death. Charlie isn't even fully aware of the fact that just the operation alone will not instantly make his I.Q of 68 be tripled he simply believes that once he regains consciousness after the operation he will immediately be as smart or even smarter than the average person this shows that Charlie only focuses on becoming smarter than his own well being in fact he even states that he fears going through the procedure but it was "okay because it was an operashun" (287). In general Charlie's only motive (wanting to be smarter) makes him blind to the actual damage he could inflict to himself.

Equally important to Charlie's self exploration, is how he wants to shape himself to fit everyone he knows needs and expectations which can be incredibly harmful to an individual to think in such a way. Although Charlie did want to personally become smarter he also thought by becoming smarter he would be included properly into society or at the very least be on the same level as his "friends" this can be seen in the text () when Charlie states he wishes to be as smart as his friends Joe and Frank (smart=mean by this Joe and Frank's version of smart is being rude and mean, Charlie can not tell the difference even though he reached amazing academical tiers he still had trouble socially functioning properly). Since Charlie's "friends" (co-workers) all treat him like rubbish throughout the story he can't tell when they're being sincere, rude, kind, etc;. It's clear that Charlie can't tell the difference between being smart and being a bully. In a way since Charlie sees they don't struggle like he does he sees them to be smart like Miss Kinnian, Charlie doesn't realize till after he's fired from his job at the factory that people like him are constantly laughed at. After having this realization that people will always constantly mock people like him he starts to feel confused to what exactly people expect and want from him, as seen on (297) were he phrases his feelings into a meaningful thought "Before they laughed at me and despised me for my ignorance and dullness; now, they hate me for my knowledge and understanding. What in God's name do they want of me"? Charlie has achieved his motive but is conflicted whether people liked him better when he was dull or how he is being intelligent (he just wants to be an individual who can equally or even if not equally be accepted).

Moreover, the way a person is raised/treated also heavily influences their personalities and identities. This can definitely be shown through Charlie since he grew up with and alcoholic father (who abandoned both him and his mother) as well as Charlie in general being distant from

both of his parents he never was sheltered or told what to do if someone mistreated him or took advantage of him. By now Charlie is infuriated with how all his life he's "foolishly played the clown" as he states in a tone of grief and shame (299). Charlie always played the "clown" since he thought that was the right social thing to do. Charlie thought that by playing this role he'd be more included into a group but in the end he made himself stand out more by letting others walk over him. Charlie by now is almost having a midlife crisis over the realization that playing the clown never did any good and was just like adding salt to open wounds, he feels both ashamed and infuriated with himself.

Given these points Charlie realizes he lacks the qualities to have him accepted as an individual or anything around that area as we can see when he lashes out his self frustration when seeing a "mentally retarded" boy being laughed at for dropping a stack of plates in a dinner: "Suddenly, I was furious at myself and all those who were smirking at him. I jumped up and shouted, "Shut up! Leave him alone! It's not his fault he can't understand! He can't help what he is! But for God's sake. . . he's still a human being!" (299). Charlie states this as a way to vent and almost defend the actions he took post surgery. Identity is an important theme that is woven throughout the text due to the fact that identity can be so many things to different people and that identity can overtime be devolved or evolved. Identity can be the qualities that separate an individual from others or society in general just as how Charlie was separated from being truly part of society due to his "dullness" (disability) as well as due to the "evils" he committed (the extent he took to be accepted and become smarter). Anyone can try just as easily as Charlie did to have a certain aspect or quality to make one's self more likable or acceptable but even then you are denied from obtaining that access if you tried so hard to the point where you would put

your own health at risk, drop the qualities that really make you who you are, or leave behind the opportunity to discover for yourself who you really are .