

## **From Exclusion to Belonging: Identity Formation and Transformation in *Wonder* (2017) Through Social Identity Theory**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to examine the formation and transformation of August Pullman (Auggie) social identity as the main character in the American drama film *Wonder* (2017). Born with a facial difference caused by Treacher Collins Syndrome, Auggie experiences discrimination, exclusion, and bullying at school, which significantly influences his self-perception. The study applied a descriptive qualitative method with the film as the main data source, consisting of dialogues, monologues, and selected visual scenes. The visual data are analyzed by using narrative elements, including mise-en-scène and cinematography as the supporting data to strengthen the interpretation of social identity representation. The theory conducted by Tajfel and Turner (1979) includes the processes of social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. The findings show that Auggie is initially categorized based on his physical appearance, which leads to exclusion. This is reinforced through social identification, where peers adopt negative group norms, and social comparison, which positions Auggie as an out-group member. However, his social identity gradually changes through positive interactions, including developing friendships, moral reflection among classmates, reduced bullying, and supportive school experiences. Key turning points in the story lead to greater acceptance, confidence, and belonging. By the end of the movie, Auggie is recognized and accepted by his peers, showing personal growth and social change. Overall, this study concludes that social identity is dynamic and can change through positive interaction and acceptance within society.

**Keywords:** Social Identity, Social Categorization, Social Identification, Social Comparison, Film

### **INTRODUCTION**

“We all deserve a standing ovation at least once in our lives (Auggie, 01:45:26, *Wonder*) reflects the fundamental human need for social recognition and validation. Johns et al. (2021) found that approximately 41% of children with craniofacial conditions reported teasing, with negative treatment commonly occurring in school settings. This finding highlights that children with facial differences often face social exclusion and difficulties in developing a positive sense of belonging within peer groups. In this context, films such as *Wonder* (2017) become important cultural representations because they portray how discrimination, peer interaction, and acceptance shape the social identity of children with craniofacial differences. Therefore, by analyzing Auggie’s experiences in the film can contribute to a deeper understanding of how social identity is constructed and transformed through everyday social interactions in school environments. Verkuyten (2021) in his analysis argues that children do not only want to have a

positive group self, but also want to develop an adequate understanding of social reality, are influenced by the norms of their group and try to do the morally right thing.

According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social identity refers to the part of an individual's self-concept derived from membership in social groups. Tajfel & Turner (1979) explain that social identity is formed through three processes: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. Part of an individual's sense of self is derived from their membership in particular social groups, leading individuals to view their group as an important part of their identity. As a result, individuals tend to favor their in-group over out-groups in order to achieve a positive social identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Khadka (2024) argues that understanding group identity is increasingly important in a globally interconnected world, where social boundaries continuously shift. Similarly, Hogg & Abrams (1988) emphasize that individuals identify with groups to enhance self-esteem and gain psychological security.

In literary studies, social identity is often examined through characters, narratives, and conflicts to understand how social structures and interactions influence personal identity development. Therefore, literary studies can also extend to visual narratives such as film. Bordwell & Thompson (2008) state that films can communicate information and ideas, while also portraying places and illustrating how individuals experience and understand their ways of life. This makes films an effective medium for analyzing social behavior and identity formation, where identity issues are represented through characters, dialogue, and social interaction. Similarly, Yang & Hamid (2024) analyze the biographical film *The Grandmaster* through Social Identity Theory to examine the transformation of identity among its characters. It concludes that film can depict how others treat someone and how they view themselves, which forms the basis of their social identity throughout the story.

*Wonder* (2017) is an American drama movie directed by Stephen Chbosky, which addresses themes of social identity, discrimination, exclusion, and bullying through visual storytelling and character-driven conflict. This movie centers on August Pullman (Auggie) as the main character, who was born with a facial difference called Treacher Collins Syndrome and serves some characters: Via (Auggie's sister), Jack (Auggie's classmate), Julian (Auggie's classmate), and Miranda (Via's best friend). The main focus of this study is on Auggie and his relationship with classmates, family, and school members. With the change in his social position within his peer group, Auggie is a suitable subject to approach the issue of social identity.

This movie clearly revealed how the feelings of difference, belonging, and comparison affected Auggie's self-confidence, which is in line with the three main processes of Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (1979): social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. Social Categorization is how individuals organize the social world into groups like "us" and "them" based on appearance. Social Identification, where individuals adopt a group's identity and become emotionally attached, which then influences their behavior; and, Social Comparison, the process of people evaluating their own group (in-group) against others (out-groups) to determine their group's value. Based on the theory, it shows how Auggie's social status gradually improves, proving that a positive social identity can be achieved despite initial exclusion.

Several previous studies have examined identity and social relations in films. Fachraizi Al (2024) examined identity transformation through bullying and forgiveness in *A Silent Voice* and found that identity is shaped by peer interactions and social responses. Lifah et al. (2020) analyzed the transformation of Sashi's identity in *English Vinglish* and concluded that language mastery and confidence contributed to her personal growth. These studies demonstrate that film

narratives can portray identity development through social experiences. The findings show that she must undergo self-categorization and social comparison to change her social identity from an ordinary housewife who does not know English to a well-educated woman who is fluent in English.

In the context of the movie, the existing studies have mainly discussed the hierarchy of needs that is represented through Auggie as the main character in the *Wonder* movie (Tarigan, 2022). The study concluded that Auggie's parents and growing peer acceptance helped fulfill his needs (love, belonging, safety, self-esteem, and self-actualization), which were initially impacted by his physical condition and social interactions. Another study by Hanif (2021) analyzes the attitude of parents and the impact of their parenting style on behavior towards Auggie, Julian, and Miranda. Hanif's study, which categorized parental attitudes as cognitive, emotive, and conative, found that Auggie's authoritarian parents led to his nice temperament, Julian's permissive and indulgent parents resulted in him being evil and selfish, and Miranda's uninvolved and inattentive parents made her lonely and miserable.

The existing previous studies on social identity mainly discuss themes such as individual transformation, hierarchy, attitude, and parenting. Unfortunately, those studies have not sufficiently explored how social identity is formed and transformed through school interactions, particularly in relation to disability and peer group dynamics. This gap is important because school is one of the primary spaces where children negotiate belonging and exclusion. Therefore, this study focuses on how Auggie's identity is constructed through his interactions with classmates, family members, and school communities. By applying Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (1979), this study aims to analyze how Auggie's social identity is formed and how it transforms throughout the film *Wonder* (2017). This study contributes to literary and film studies by demonstrating how visual narratives represent identity development, inclusion, and social change.

## METHOD

The primary data of this study consist of selected scenes, dialogues, monologues, character behavior, and social interactions in *Wonder* (2017) that represent Auggie's experiences of discrimination, exclusion, friendship, and acceptance. Secondary data including narrative elements such as setting, costume, facial expression, and camera movement were also used as supporting data when they strengthened the interpretation of social identity representation. The interpretation of these cinematic elements referred to Bordwell and Thompson's (2008) perspective that film elements contribute to meaning-making and character representation. This study applies a descriptive qualitative method combined with thematic analysis to examine Auggie's social identity formation and transformation based on Tajfel and Turner's (1979) three processes of Social Identity Theory: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison.

The data collection process began by repeatedly watching the movie to understand the storyline, character development, and social conflicts. The familiarization process included reviewing scenes, reading dialogues, and taking notes related to Auggie's identity development. Next, the selected scenes and dialogues were coded based on the three processes of Social Identity Theory. Scenes involving labeling or exclusion were categorized as social categorization, scenes involving conformity to peer-group norms were categorized as social identification, and scenes involving in-group and out-group distinctions were categorized as social comparison. The coded data were then grouped into themes to identify patterns of

exclusion, acceptance, and identity transformation. Finally, the findings were interpreted critically and connected with Social Identity Theory to explain how Auggie's social identity develops throughout the movie.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION


This chapter presents the findings and discussion that analyze how Auggie's social identity forms and transforms in *Wonder* (2017). By using Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory as the main framework, the discussion highlights the three key processes: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. Those three processes represent the illustration of Auggie's social identity through his journey from initial exclusion to gradual acceptance. The findings are divided into two main sections: the formation of Auggie's social identity and the transformation of his social identity throughout the movie.

### THE FORMATION OF AUGGIE'S SOCIAL IDENTITY THROUGH THE THREE KEYS PROCESSES FROM SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY (TAJFEL AND TURNER, 1979)

#### AUGGIE'S SOCIAL CATEGORIZATION

Social categorization is the first key process of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It is how people group themselves and others to simplify the social world, often leading to stereotyping, labeling, and boundaries between "normal" and "different" groups. In *Wonder* (2017), Auggie's classmates categorize him based only on his facial difference, which increases his risk of being socially marginalized. The analysis of this process is presented from two perspectives: society's and Auggie itself.

Table 1. Society's point of view

Dialogue	Scene	Description
Julian: What's the deal with the braid in the back of your hair? Is it like a Padawan thing? Charlotte: What's a Padawan thing? Julian: Oh. It's from Star Wars. (00:18:03 - 00:18:11)		Julian categorized Auggie as the Padawan (Star Wars) based on Auggie's braid hair in his first day of public school.

Julian's question about Auggie's braid reflects social categorization because he immediately judges Auggie based on his appearance instead of knowing him personally as a new classmate. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social categorization occurs when people classify others into groups based on visible differences. By comparing Auggie to a "Padawan" from Star Wars, Julian places him as someone unusual and different from the other students. This labeling creates a boundary between the "normal" students and Auggie as the outsider. As a result, Auggie is socially excluded from the beginning of his first day at school, showing how appearance influences the formation of his social identity.

Table 2. Society's point of view

Dialogue	Scene	Description
7th-grade senior: Holy crap. Look at his face. He's a freak. I've never seen anything that ugly in my life. Maybe it's an Orc. (01:34:58-01:35:05)		Auggie was categorized as an Orc (monster) based on his facial appearance by the 7th grade at the forest while in Beecher Prep School camp.

The comment “Maybe it’s an Orc” shows social categorization because the seventh-grade student judges Auggie based on his facial appearance and compares him to a monster. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social categorization happens when people classify others into certain groups based on visible differences. In this scene, Auggie is placed who is seen as abnormal and different from the other students. This labeling creates social distance and strengthens Auggie’s exclusion from his peers. The forest camp setting also strengthens the analysis because the absence of teachers and formal school supervision allows the students to express their prejudice more openly toward Auggie. Therefore, the scene shows how negative stereotypes based on appearance influence Auggie’s social identity. As a result, the scene shows how negative stereotypes based on appearance influence Auggie’s social identity.

Table 3. Auggie's point of view

Dialogue	Scene	Description
Auggie: Why do I have to be so ugly? Auggie: They won't even talk to me. It matters that I look different. I try to pretend that it doesn't, but it does. (00:24:10 - 00:24:55)		Auggie defined that he looked “ugly” after getting bullied, which affected his having a bad day on his first day of school.

Auggie’s statement, “Why do I have to be so ugly?” reflects social categorization because he begins to internalize the negative labels given by his classmates. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social categorization happens when people classify others based on visible differences, creating distinctions between “us” and “them.” In this scene, Auggie realizes that his classmates avoid and exclude him because of his facial appearance. Their treatment makes him see himself as different and unwanted within the school environment. Auggie’s crying facial expression strengthens the analysis because it visually shows the emotional impact of being repeatedly categorized as an outsider member, revealing how social rejection affects his self-perception. Therefore, the scene shows how social categorization not only affects how others view Auggie, but also shapes his confidence.

Table 4. Auggie's point of view

Dialogue	Scene	Description
Auggie (Monologue): For me, Halloween is the best holiday in the world. It's so awesome when I'm wearing a costume. I usually walk with my head down to avoid being seen. But on Halloween, I		Auggie considers himself a student who is avoided because of his different appearance, particularly his facial deformity. On Halloween, he can walk with his head held high because he's

Dialogue	Scene	Description
walk with my head up high. Especially because people don't like to touch me because they think I'm contagious. (00:44:29 - 00:45:00)		wearing a costume, which helps him avoid bad attention and mistreatment.

Auggie's monologue about Halloween critically reflects social categorization because he believes others judge and avoid him based on his facial appearance. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social categorization happens when individuals are grouped based on visible differences. Auggie's statement that people think he is "contagious" shows that he has internalized the negative way others see him. However, by wearing a costume on Halloween, he feels more accepted and confident because his appearance is hidden. This scene shows how social categorization affects Auggie's confidence and the way he sees himself in social situations.

#### AUGGIE'S SOCIAL IDENTIFICATION

Building directly on social categorization — which labeled Auggie as 'different' — the second key process, social identification, emerges in his classmates' behavior. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social identification is the stage where individuals internalize a group's norms, values, and behaviors as part of their own identity. In the movie, this section is primarily shown through conformity: classmates such as Jack and Ximena adopt the exclusionary attitudes of the dominant peer group in order to protect their own social status. Their decision to associate with Auggie becomes a calculated act, carefully weighed against the risk of losing their social acceptance.

Table 5. Halloween Day

Dialogue	Scene	Description
Miles: It really does look like him Julian: reminded me of, like the shrunken head, you know? Jack: Yeah, if I looked like him, I think I'd kill myself (00:45:24-00:45:27)		Jack tries to maintain his positive social status by adopting Julian's group norm, which always labels Auggie in the previous process.


Jack's statement, "If I looked like him, I think I'd kill myself," demonstrates social identification because he follows Julian's negative behavior to maintain acceptance within the group. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social identification happens when individuals adopt the attitudes and norms of their group as part of their social identity. Although Jack is originally friendly toward Auggie, he joins Julian's jokes to avoid losing his own social status. The presence of Halloween costumes symbolically represents how the students hide their genuine feelings and perform behaviors that match the expectations of the dominant peer group. This scene shows that peer pressure influences Jack to prioritize group acceptance over empathy, reinforcing Auggie's exclusion from the dominant peer group.

Table 6. Halloween Day

Dialogue	Scene	Description
<p>Julian: Why do you hang out with him so much, Jack?                      Jack: I don't know. Tushman asked me to be his welcome buddy, and now he just follows me around everywhere.                      (00:45:33 - 00:45:37)</p>		<p>Jack views his friendship with Auggie as an obligation from Mr. Tushman (the principal) and pressure from his mother to behave well in school because he holds a scholarship.</p>

Jack's statement that he only hangs out with Auggie because he was assigned to be his "welcome buddy" demonstrates social identification because he adjusts his behavior to follow the dominant peer group's attitude toward Auggie. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social identification occurs when individuals adopt group norms and behaviors to maintain acceptance within the group. By presenting his friendship with Auggie as an obligation rather than a sincere choice, Jack attempts to protect his social status and avoid rejection from Julian's group. The camera movement strengthens this analysis by focusing on Jack's uncomfortable body language before shifting to eye contact with Auggie, while Julian is shown through a more confident close-up shot. This visual contrast highlights the power imbalance within the group and emphasizes Jack's discomfort as he conforms to the group's anti-Auggie behavior.

Table 7. Lunch break at the cafeteria

Dialogue	Scene	Description
<p>Charlotte: I wonder what happened.                      Ximena: Maybe Jack touched Auggie and couldn't wash his hands this time. Jack finally got "the plague".                      (00:54:19 - 00:54:22)</p>		<p>The girl group wondered what happened between Jack and Auggie. After Auggie did not want to sit with Jack anymore, because of Jack's hurtful words on Halloween Day against Auggie.</p>


Social identification occurs in this scene as Ximena reinforces the dominant peer group's negative attitude toward Auggie by mocking Jack for associating with him. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social identification happens when individuals adopt the norms and values of their group to maintain acceptance and belonging. By using the word "plague", Ximena symbolically portrays Auggie as someone socially undesirable, encouraging others to distance themselves from him. This dialogue shows how peer pressure is used to maintain informal group rules and preserve the group's social status by rejecting Auggie. The cafeteria setting strengthens the analysis because it represents a public social space where students observe and judge each other's interactions, increasing the pressure to conform to dominant group behavior.

#### AUGGIE'S SOCIAL COMPARISON

Social comparison is the last process, defined as the tendency of individuals to evaluate their own group (in-group) by contrasting it with other groups (out-group) to maintain a positive self-image (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In Wonder (2017), social comparison is demonstrated in the way certain students construct a dominant in-group based on their physical "appearance" while positioning Auggie as part of the out-group due to his facial differences (Treacher Collins


Syndrome). This comparison leads to favoritism and avoidance, which deeply affect Auggie's self-image and how he develops socially at school.

Table 8. Auggie’s School Tour at the Science Laboratory

Dialogue	Scene	Description
Julian: Science is supposedly really hard. But you’re taking it, too, right? Hey, maybe you could fail together. (00:07:35 - 00:07:37)		Julian, Charlotte, and Jack are the student representatives to take Auggie on a school tour.

The scene above refers to social comparison because Julian tries to position Auggie as inferior in order to reinforce the superiority of the dominant peer group. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social comparison occurs when individuals compare their in-group with an out-group to maintain a positive social identity. Julian’s statement that Auggie and Jack could “fail together” shows a negative judgment toward Auggie’s academic ability and places him below the other students. Through this comparison, Julian strengthens the image of his group as more capable and socially superior while marginalizing Auggie as the out-group member. Although the scene also contains elements of social categorization and social identification, the main focus remains the comparison between the dominant group and Auggie. The camera movement further supports this analysis by showing Julian standing in front of Jack and Auggie, visually emphasizing his dominance and the unequal relationship between the in-group and the out-group in the interaction.

Table 9. Julian’s confession and punishment after bullying Auggie

Dialogue	Scene	Description
Mrs. Albans (Julian’s Mom): No. No, he didn’t. I did. But when our friends come over and they see that picture. I want them to ask about our son, not the Pullmans. (01:28:15 - 01:28:18)		Julian’s mother removed Auggie from Julian's class photo to protect her family's social image in front of guests who were visiting their home.

Mrs. Albans’ actions reflect social comparison because she tries to maintain her family’s positive social image by distancing herself from Auggie as the Pullman family. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social comparison occurs when individuals compare their in-group with an out-group to maintain a sense of superiority of her identity. By removing Auggie from Julian’s class photo, she positions Auggie as someone socially undesirable and ensures that attention remains focused on her own son (Julian). This action strengthens the distinction between her family as the socially accepted in-group and Auggie (Pullman) as the out-group member. The home setting supports this analysis because it shows how prejudice and exclusion continue beyond the school environment and are reinforced within family and social spaces.

Table 10. Julian and Jack fight after science class

Dialogue	Scene	Description
Jack: Dude, I don't want to switch. Julian: Why not? Do you really wanna be partners with that freak? (01:08:54 - 01:08:58)		Julian compares Auggie as a “freak” partner because Jack did not want to switch to be his partner with Amos for their science fair project.

In this scene, Julian’s reaction to Jack’s decision to partner with Auggie demonstrates social comparison because Julian attempts to maintain the superiority of his peer group by distancing himself from Auggie as the out-group member. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social comparison occurs when individuals evaluate their in-group against an out-group to maintain a positive social identity. By calling Auggie a “freak”, Julian negatively compares Auggie to the socially accepted students and reinforces the idea that associating with him lowers group status. Julian’s angry facial expression strengthens this analysis because it shows his frustration when Jack refuses to follow his group norm. In contrast, Jack’s serious and firm facial expression reflects his rejection of Julian’s negative comparison and shows his decision to prioritize empathy over peer acceptance. This action is a clear rejection of the pressure to maintain superiority through negative comparison, highlighting Auggie's gradual journey toward acceptance.

**THE TRANSFORMATION OF AUGGIE’S SOCIAL IDENTITY AFTER THROUGH THE THREE KEYS PROCESSES OF SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY (TAJFEL & TURNER, 1979)**

Building on the previous analysis, which established the formation of Auggie's initial social identity through three key processes, this section will examine his subsequent identity transformation based on the second research question (1.2). This transformation demonstrates a gradual, positive movement toward acceptance for Auggie within his school environment. This section of the analysis continues by applying the same theory of Social Identity by Tajfel and Turner (1979) through specific scenes and dialogues, by dividing it into before and after processes. This shift demonstrates how the three key processes before can be utilized to build a positive and empowering social identity for Auggie.



Table 11. Auggie’s classmates started to be friends with him

Before	After	Description
 (00:18:38)	 (01:24:50)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Before: On his first day of school, no one wanted to sit with him in the cafeteria.</li> <li>- After: Auggie’s classmates started to be nice and friends with him by sitting together in the cafeteria.</li> </ul>

The "After" scene illustrates the positive transformation of Auggie's social identity by reversing the same three SIT processes. His friends' decision to sit with him rejects the previous appearance-based categorization, shifting him from a feared "them" to a valued "us" member based on character. This is a powerful act of positive Social Identification, where peers choose



to align their self-concept with a norm of kindness, breaking away from the exclusionary pressures of the dominant group. This shift culminates in a positive Social Comparison, where the newly formed in-group's value is derived from genuine acceptance rather than from maintaining superiority through discrimination, validating Auggie's identity as a respected and included student.

Table 12. Auggie feels happy to be at school

Before	After	Description
 <p><small>If you're mad at Mom about going to school</small></p> <p>Auggie's Mom: How was your first day of school? Auggie Good. Mom: Good how? Good like it was good? Or good like it was bad and you just don't wanna tell us? Auggie: It was good, okay? I just don't know what you want me to say? It was good! Dad: Okay, okay, hey! If you're mad at Mom about going to school, it was my idea, too. (00:22:25-00:22:37)</p>	 <p><small>but I'm really happy to be here</small></p> <p>Auggie: Mom. Mom: Yes? Auggie: Thank you. Mom: For what? Auggie: Making me go to school. I was so mad at you sometimes. But I'm really happy to be here. (01:41:00-01:41:22)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Before: Auggie felt upset because he had a bad day on his first day of public school, everyone bullying and not being nice with him. He was mad at his mom for making him go to public school.</li> <li>- After: Even though he is mad at his mom, on his graduation day Auggie feels grateful and happy because being there. By saying thank you to his mom, means that he has a lot of friends and got accepted by his peers</li> </ul>

“After” scene illustrates the successful transformation of Auggie’s social identity after experiencing all of the processes. Social Categorization refers to Auggie no longer seeing himself as separate from others, but as a normal student of the school community. His gratitude toward his mother shows that school has become a place where he belongs rather than a space of fear. Social Identification, where Auggie now positively embraces his identity as a friend of his peer group. This indicates that he has internalized confidence and pride from his new experiences. Finally, Social Comparison becomes positive when he no longer measures himself through rejection, but through achievement. As a result, his identity transforms from insecurity into confidence, belonging, and self-acceptance.

Table 13. Auggie did not wear his astronaut helmet

Before	After	Description
 <p>(00:20:10)</p>	 <p><small>the astronaut helmet in public</small></p> <p>Dad: when you started you were still wearing the astronaut helmet in public. Auggie: I love that helmet. I wish I knew where it was. Dad: It's in my office.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Before: Auggie got bullied on his first day at school, which made him feel insecure about his condition. His mom picked him, and he just wore the helmet.</li> <li>- After: On his graduation day, he did not need the helmet anymore, because Auggie felt confident and tried to accept his</li> </ul>

Before	After	Description
	<p>Auggie: What? Dad! That was a gift. You had no right to hide it!</p> <p>Dad: Auggie, Auggie, please, don't be mad. You gotta understand, you were wearing it all the time. I never got to see you anymore. I missed your face. I know you don't always like it, but I love it. It's my son's face. I wanna see it. Do you forgive me?</p> <p>Auggie: No. Yes. Does Mom know?</p> <p>Dad: No. God, no, she'd kill me. But I can maybe find it, if you need it back.</p> <p>Auggie: That's okay.</p> <p>(01:38:20)</p>	facial differences.

Auggie's final response of "That's okay" regarding his astronaut helmet highlights the successful transformation of his social identity toward acceptance, signifying a profound and positive reversal of the three processes: social categorization is overcome as Auggie is no longer defined by his facial difference but is re-categorized by himself and his peers based on his character; concurrently, social identification transforms as he internalizes a positive self-concept, validated by his father's unconditional love, which is visually represented by his willingness to abandon the helmet, the physical symbol of his initial avoidance; and social comparison is resolved because his new identity is derived from inclusion that leads to confidence, solidifying his movement from a state of exclusion.

Table 14. Auggie got the medal on his graduation day



Before	After	Description
 <p>Auggie (Monologue): My mom always said "If you don't like where you are... just picture where you wanna be." (00:14:25-00:14:30)</p>	 <p>Auggie: Walking up towards that stage, I felt like I was floating. My heart was beating so fast. I didn't really understand why I was getting a medal. It's not like I blew up the Death Star. All I did was get through fifth grade, just like everyone else here. (01:43:59-01:44:17)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Before: Auggie walks with his head down because it's his first time walking without a helmet in a public area, and then all the students look at him strangely and move away from him.</li> <li>- After: Auggie gets his medal on graduation day, now he confidently walks with his head held high towards the stage to celebrate his success.</li> </ul>

Table 15, the "After" scene, where Auggie reflects on his medal, marks the successful transformation of his social identity that brings about acceptance. In the first process, he no longer defines himself by his difference, but by placing himself among the regular students ("just like everyone else"). This leads to a positive Social Identification; he internalizes an identity of normalcy and belonging, finding pride in the simple act of enduring and succeeding in the school environment. Finally, it is completely resolved through the true victory, proof that

his positive self-image now is derived not from external heroism ("It's not like I blew up the Death Star") but from achieving parity with his peers, validating his personal journey from social exclusion to full integration.

The findings of this study confirm that Auggie's social identity in *Wonder* (2017) is formed and transformed through the three sequential processes proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), operating not as isolated mechanisms but as interconnected forces that collectively shape both how Auggie is perceived by his peers and how he comes to perceive himself. While this pattern is broadly consistent with the original framework, the present study extends it in an important respect. Tajfel and Turner (1979) developed Social Identity Theory primarily in contexts where group boundaries are socially constructed rather than immediately visible. The case of Auggie, whose facial difference renders his out-group status instantly apparent, reveals that physical appearance can function as an involuntary social marker that accelerates and intensifies the categorization process beyond what the original framework anticipated. Unlike conventional group membership, Auggie cannot strategically manage or selectively disclose his difference, which suggests that Social Identity Theory requires additional theoretical consideration when applied to contexts of visible physical difference, where categorization is imposed rather than negotiated.

These findings are broadly consistent with Fachraizi Al (2024), who found that social identity is shaped progressively through peer interactions and social responses in *A Silent Voice* (2016), and with Lifah et al. (2020), who demonstrated that identity transformation in *English Vinglish* (2012) is driven by growing confidence and shifting social perception. Both studies confirm that identity is dynamic and responsive to social experience, supporting the conclusions of the present study. However, a meaningful distinction emerges across these cases. In *A Silent Voice*, transformation is driven primarily by individual moral reckoning and forgiveness, while in *English Vinglish*, it depends largely on the protagonist's acquisition of new competencies. In *Wonder*, by contrast, transformation is catalyzed by collective moral reflection within the peer group and institutional recognition, suggesting that for individuals whose difference is physically visible, identity change is less contingent on personal skill development and more dependent on the surrounding social group's willingness to revise its exclusionary norms. This distinction shifts the locus of identity transformation from the individual to the collective, which represents a theoretically significant contribution to the existing literature.

The findings further complement Tarigan (2022), who examined Auggie's experiences through Maslow's hierarchy of needs and concluded that parental and peer support facilitated his psychological development, and Verkuyten (2021), who argued that children navigate moral norms alongside group identity concerns. The present study adds a more granular account of how belonging is socially constructed and reclaimed through the interplay of categorization, identification, and comparison processes. Particularly notable is the role of moral agency within the peer group, evident in Jack's decision to defend Auggie against Julian's bullying, which disrupts the previously established exclusionary norms and redefines the in-group's identity around empathy rather than superiority. This finding suggests that peer group moral development plays a more active role in identity transformation than Tajfel and Turner's (1979) original framework has traditionally acknowledged, as the framework primarily emphasizes positive distinctiveness through intergroup competition rather than intragroup moral change.

Taken together, these findings carry meaningful implications for educational contexts. Auggie's journey from systematic exclusion to communal recognition illustrates that identity transformation under conditions of visible physical difference requires not only personal resilience but also sustained collective moral development within the social environment.

Schools and educators may therefore play a decisive role in shaping the social identities of students with physical differences by fostering structured opportunities for positive peer interaction, inclusive group norms, and institutional recognition. This study also demonstrates the value of film as a methodological and analytical resource in social identity research, as visual elements including facial expression, costume, camera movement, and setting enrich the interpretive analysis of identity processes in ways that dialogue alone cannot fully capture.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the formation and transformation of Auggie's social identity in *Wonder* using Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (1979). The findings show that Auggie's identity is initially shaped through exclusion based on his facial difference. Through social categorization, he is labeled as different and marginalized by his peers. Through social identification, other students adopt negative group norms to maintain acceptance. Through social comparison, dominant groups reinforce superiority by positioning Auggie as the out-group member.

However, Auggie's identity gradually transforms through friendship, support, and recognition. He gains confidence, develops a sense of belonging, and becomes socially accepted within the school community. His journey demonstrates that identity can change through positive interaction and inclusive environments. By forming friendships and gaining recognition, he becomes more confident, socially connected, and appreciated. Auggie changes from a child who feared being seen into a student who can proudly stand in front of everyone on his graduation day, demonstrated by receiving a medal recognizing his exemplary character.

This study specifically contributes to Social Identity Theory by showing how visible physical differences influence the formation of in-group and out-group boundaries in everyday school interactions. The case of Auggie itself reveals that physical appearance becomes an immediate social marker that affects how individuals are categorized, judged, and treated within peer groups. In addition, this study shows that acceptance and recognition from others play an important role in transforming marginalized identities into positive social identities. Methodologically, the use of film as data allows the study to analyze not only dialogue and interaction, but also visual elements such as facial expression, setting, costume, and camera movement that strengthen the representation of social identity processes. In conclusion, *Wonder* (2017) illustrates how social identity is continuously shaped and transformed through social interaction, representation, and collective acceptance within society.

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