I have already theorised that it is the label – intentionally alluded to or retrospectively applied by someone other than the author – that renders characters deviant. Characters that are labelled 'autistic' within the meta-discourse might be (re-)read differently but are otherwise not affected by such a label. However, autists in real life will suffer equally real consequences. In Chapter 3.3 I discussed Loftis's critique of negative stereotypes associated with Sherlock Holmes. Here, the retrospectively applied label 'autistic' led to autists being likened to Holmes. Thus, even labelling fictional characters may impact (public) stereotypes and therefore affect the treatment of autists. While a label might draw positive attention to a character and perhaps even educate people on a certain concept, this technique remains questionable. After all, it raises the question of who benefits from such ascriptions – will it foster awareness for autists in real life or does it boil down to sensational journalism?

Deviance in Fiction – *The London Eye Mystery*

Arguably, *The London Eye Mystery* portrays the least instances of othering and subsequent harassment of all novels examined. Yet, it becomes obvious that Ted is 'not normal' by the way other characters react to and interact with him. In this section, I wish to explore how normality and deviance are negotiated within the novel.

As a result of being deviant, Ted struggles to make friends among his classmates. Moreover, Ted's mother, as well as his sister and his teacher, tend to make up rules that are supposed to help him be 'more normal'. For example, Ted prefers to wear his school uniform even during the holidays, even though his sister advises him "to put on a T-shirt and jeans and be 'normal and chilled'" (*London Eye Mystery* 22).

The arrival of his aunt Gloria represents an instance of an outsider judging the family. Because she is very blunt and openly voices

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eskalierenden Wechselspiel gerät die Identität des Kontrollierten in dem Maße unter Druck, in dem ihr die Bestätigung durch andere verweigert wird." (Keckeisen 38–39)

her thoughts, she becomes something akin to a spokesperson for the 'public opinion'. On the other hand, Ted's cousin Salim approaches him seemingly without prejudice. His acceptance embodies a radically different way of 'dealing' with Ted's autism; one that resists the urge to change him. However, I shall expect his mother's, sister's, and teacher's intentions to be good, having at least somewhat Ted's best interests in mind.

I will focus this analysis on dialogues in which Ted's deviance is established, starting with Gloria's and Salim's arrival:

> 'God, Faith,' she [Gloria] went on. 'He's the spit of your father. D'you remember? Dad in his suit and tie, even on holiday? Ted's the image of him.'
> There was a silence. It was true that I wore my school trousers and shirt every day even if I wasn't going to school. It's what I liked to do. Kat was always on at me to put on a T-shirt and jeans and be 'normal and chilled' but that made me want to wear my uniform even more.
> Salim said, 'No, Mum. He looks a right cool dude. The formal look's all the rage again, didn't you know?'
> 'Hruum,' I said.
> 'The look's a disguise, Mum. It hides the rebel within – right, Ted?'
> I nodded. It felt good being called a rebel. (*London Eye Mystery* 21–22)

Using Keckeisen's terminology, the topic of negotiation is Ted's appearance, with Gloria making the accusation ('Ted is not dressed like 12-year-olds commonly dress during their holidays') and Ted justifying himself, albeit only to the reader ('I like to wear these clothes'). Gloria's accusation is followed by a silence for presumably two reasons: 1) Ted's family has been made (once more) aware of Ted's clothing preferences, thus they have to reconsider their judgement and whether they should defend him; 2) Gloria has changed the situation by not only registering Ted's look but making a remark on them, subsequently establishing deviance. Although the style of clothing is a rather subtle form of deviance, Gloria's reference to the grandfather 'in his suit and tie, even on holiday' implies that this behaviour was considered odd enough to have become a family

memory. Salim then joins the negotiations and comes to Ted's defence by stating (whether true or not) that Ted's clothes are 'all the rage again'. By doing so, Salim partially revokes Ted's deviance; Ted's clothes are different, but they are so *by choice*. Whereas Gloria operates with categories of protonormality ('even on holiday'), implying that there are norms for how to dress when you are off work, Salim applies flexible normalism to the situation. The brief dialogue already reflects the different roles, with Gloria voicing her thoughts openly, Salim renegotiating her accusations and Ted's family being embarrassed by the fact that Ted's deviance was recognised and is now openly discussed.

Ted himself, on the other hand, has already made the diagnosis part of his identity.

> 'I've heard of him [Andy Warhol],' said Kat. 'He was a weirdo.'
> 'He was a Cultural Icon,' said Aunt Gloria. 'I'd say he embodied the twentieth century. Some people even think he might have had' – she looked at Mum – 'you know. What Ted's got.'
> There was a silence.
> 'Like I said,' Kat said. 'A weirdo.'
> Mum's lips pressed up tight. I figured out that Kat had made her cross. But I didn't care. I know I'm a weirdo. My brain runs on a different operating system from other people's. I see things they don't and sometimes they see things I don't. As far as I'm concerned, if Andy Warhol was like me, then one day I'd be a cultural icon too. (*London Eye Mystery* 30–31)

Ted's diagnosis is ontological, in the sense that it relates to the aetiological paradigm. Moreover, because it has already been established, further negotiation is unnecessary. Ted's reaction to his sister's defamation ('I didn't care. I know I'm a weirdo') makes it evident that he has internalised the stigma; in other words, the label has become an ontological status through stigmatisation. Here, the consequences of his deviance are at stake, i.e. the effects his diagnosis has on his actions and his very being. While Kat calls him a 'weirdo', thus framing Ted's deviance decidedly negative, Gloria suggests that Andy Warhol might have been a

cultural icon because, or at the very least despite, his autism. From this, I can deduce, that Gloria does not necessarily link Ted's stigma to negative stereotypes. In other words, although she has accepted Ted's deviance as a fact, her expectations differ. Ted picks up on this and turns Gloria's comment into something positive, comparing himself to Andy Warhol as a cultural icon, thus re-integrating the stigma as part of his identity.

Gloria also states something the family is aware of but does not talk about freely. The silence that follows indicates that the conversation has at least temporarily been derailed. Based on Goffman's 'free' and 'non-free' goods, Lakoff stated that "[c]learly there are some topics that one may ask about freely and others that are 'none of your business'—that is, non-free goods" (qtd. in Thomas, "Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Failure" 105). While free and non-free topics may vary from individual to individual, taboos are culturally considered to be non-free (Thomas, "Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Failure" 105). I consider Ted's diagnosis a non-free topic; quite likely, the parents do not wish to discuss this topic with someone outside the family, especially if it is emotionally charged. Yet, Ted's diagnosis also seems to be a taboo of some sort, since even Gloria does not dare mention it to her sister more explicitly than alluding to it ('You know. What Ted's got'). In a sense, Ted's deviance is not open knowledge. However, because it also appears to be a non-free topic *within the family*, it implies that Ted's diagnosis is something undesirable and perhaps even tragic that should be ignored as best as possible. Ted's mother is obviously uncomfortable discussing her son's diagnosis and although Ted links his mother's reaction to Kat's words, it is likely that she is also offended by Gloria breaching a non-free topic.

However, Ted is acutely aware of his deviance and conflicted by it as becomes apparent in his dialogue with Salim:

> 'You know this – this syndrome thing you've got?' he said.
> 'Hrumm,' I said, wondering who had told him.
> 'Hope you don't mind me asking. But what is it? What's it like?'
> No one had ever asked me that before. I lay back on my pillow and thought. 'It's this thing in my brain,' I said.

'Yeah?'
'It's not that I'm sick.'
'No.'
'Or stupid.'
'I know that.'
'But I'm not normal either.'
'So? Who is?'
'It's like the brain is a computer,' I said. 'But mine works on a different operating system from other people's. And my wiring's different too.'
'Neat,' said Salim.
'It means I am very good at thinking about facts and how things work and the doctors say I am at the high functioning end of the spectrum.' I'd also once heard a doctor say to Mum that my developmental path was skewed. I didn't tell Salim this because I looked up 'skewed' in the dictionary and it said 'crooked', which makes it sound as if I am a criminal, which I am not. …
'You know an awful lot,' Salim said. 'I can tell from all these books.' He pointed at my shelves of encyclopaedias. 'Why bother trying to be something that you're not?'
'Mr Shepherd says if I learn how to be like other people, even just on the outside, not inside, then I'll make more friends.' Then I told him something I'd never told anyone before. 'I don't like being different. I don't like being in my brain. Sometimes it's like a big empty space where I'm all on my own. And there's nothing else, just me.' (*London Eye Mystery* 36–39)

Ted is characterised by his wish to make friends. In order to do so he has been taught that he needs to 'be like other people, even just on the outside'. Although Ted has internalised the stigma, he is determined to get rid of it. Furthermore, he has internalised that his diagnosis is a taboo, i.e. something that should be kept hidden or he will be stigmatised for it. For example, Ted anticipates Salim's assumptions by stating that he is neither sick nor stupid, thus he has presumably encountered these prejudices before. While Ted previously stated that he knows he is a 'weirdo' and does not care, this dialogue shows that he does indeed care, as he feels compelled to justify himself. Furthermore, when Salim suggests he

embrace his deviance, Ted explains that he wishes to find friends, implying that he cannot imagine people liking him for being different. Salim again applies flexible normalism to the situation ('Who is [normal]?'), thus blurring the lines, whereas Ted's teacher Mr Shepherd is contrasted as being normative, i.e. his goal is not to raise awareness and foster understanding for Ted's differences but to annihilate them as best as possible so as to make Ted 'more normal', i.e. normal to an acceptable degree. As such, both Salim and the teacher embody 'normality' that is contrasted with Ted's deviance. Interestingly, this dialogue also shows two more instances in which Ted's deviance is negotiated by others. First of all, Ted states that no one has ever asked him what the syndrome felt like (thus perhaps he did come up with the comparison himself). Secondly, he mentions how the doctor told his mother that his developmental path was 'skewed'. Ted cannot possibly be 'normal', because other groups, including his family, his teachers, doctors, classmates, etc, are more powerful and thus able to set the standards.

Again, Ted is the character encountering the least instances of othering or harassment, yet he is acutely aware of his deviance to the point that he has internalised the stigma. In fact, aside from Christopher in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, all characters have internalised their deviant status and are aware of the fact that they are 'not normal' but are also expected to fit in and will experience harassment if they do not. Because autism is no visible stigma, most characters opt to hide their deviance. On one hand, they are aware of the label they have received from medical experts, which is usually also common knowledge within the family. On the other hand, these characters choose not to make the diagnosis public, presumably because they reckon that a diagnosis would lead to instant stigmatisation, whereas otherwise, they can renegotiate their deviance (or normality) anew, every time they enter a new social setting. However, the fear of being 'found out' and the pressure to fit in usually take a toll on the mental health of these individuals.

I previously discussed retrospectively applied labels that are part of our normalities but were not, in fact, part of the normalities a historical figure lived in. The example of Ted demonstrates how deviance affects

the way his surroundings interact with and react towards him. Retrospectively labelling a character (or historical figure) will attribute them deviance but it cannot possibly affect them, their self-understanding, or their interaction with others. There are several aspects to be considered, such as whether the nature of deviance affects their social standing, however, for my study, I will simply retain that such retrospectively applied labels, which were not, in fact, part of their normalities, cannot possibly explain a character's intentions, self-understanding, and freely made choices.

Deviance and Mental Health

Although society creates its own normality (normalities), which is subsequently reflected in literature, there is not much flexibility involved. Indeed, the undertow of normality can be considered quite strong, given that it also manifests itself within institutions such as the judicial system. In reality, deviance can have devastating effects on an individual.

Put simply, there are two main factors that put autists at a higher risk of developing mental health issues: not fitting in and trying to fit in. Studies on autism stigmatisation differentiate between perceived, anticipated, experienced, and internalised stigma. Here, the label 'autistic' has become a defining ontological fact about the individual, thus not allowing the autist to renegotiate their status but leading to them being categorised by prejudice and stereotypical assumptions. The *perceived* stigma is "thought to be present against autistic people generally" (Han et al. 16), and decidedly negative, with the stereotypical assumption "of autistic people as [being] male, minimally verbal, infantile, or violent" (16). Interestingly, apart from Christopher (*Curious Incident*), this stigma does not fit any of the characters examined. It also does not coincide with the stereotypes Loftis mentioned, nor the portrayal of Sherlock Holmes(see Chapter 3). This could be explained by two things; either the perceived stigma is not actually as negative as described, or fictional portrayals of autism are based on a very different stereotype. Either way,