

Representation in Media - The Good, The Bad, The Ugly.

I've been thinking about representation in the media we consume ever since I read *Forget Me Not* by Ellie Terry. It's a short, middle grade novel that's written entirely in prose poems, featuring a young girl called Casi. She struggles to fit into a new school due to her tourettes syndrome (TS), anxiety and OCD. Along the way, she finds a friend in a Chinese boy called Jinsong.

This book had a big impact on me as a half Chinese girl with tics. I originally found it by searching for books about TS, which I had barely even considered existing. The asian rep was an added plus. I thought the way Terry dealt with TS, mental health issues and asian culture was done really well, and was very informed. I felt understood with the tics specific pages that talked about the feeling of having to tic no matter how you try to suppress it to fit in, and how people will laugh at you regardless. Casi was relatable, and felt like a bite sized chunk of me. Living through Casi to peer into the window of Jinsong's home life was fun because I was able to pick out bits and pieces that applied to my own life, which isn't actually something I've ever been able to do in books.

Upon finishing, I found myself really being glad the book existed for 10-13 year olds, and how I and the other people around me would have benefited from reading it at that age or even now, as I did. I can think of several things in my childhood and life today that wouldn't have occurred if my peers just understood my culture and my condition, or wanted to try to understand.

I really do think it's not often that we see representation for mental and physical disabilities, despite it being so common in so many people. There's a lot we don't see in books; mental health issues, LGBTQ themes, non white cultures (and even just non-American). For films and TV they, in my opinion, at least tend to have a bit more racial diversity on average, though in many cases it only exists for viewer brownie points too. But as popular books are mostly written by able bodied, straight, white people, we don't get to see characters with these different traits.

This is problematic because it creates a bubble. Readers are trapped in a comfort zone of healthy, white, straight characters, when in reality this doesn't apply to even half the people we meet. We all know different types of people with different backgrounds, whether it's obvious or not. We only alienate ourselves by staying in our own head.

What I would love to see from books today are main and side characters that come from different cultural backgrounds, are members of the LGBTQ community, with different disabilities and conditions. I'd like to see diverse casts that are created that way to add nuance and interesting qualities to characters, not just dropping in a total of one ambiguously black character to claim diversity. For authors not to tiptoe around disabilities or only involve mental health when it applies to the plot. And for the love of god, if you do have them, please don't kill them.

It's so, so important for people to realise different lives when they can't experience them for themselves, and it's so important for authors and writers to include characters with different traits in a real, respectful way. With these kinds of books not only could we better understand

and empathise with our friends, peers and the world, but we could also better understand ourselves. If the writing and the publishing world were to take off their rose coloured glasses it would benefit us all, from an eager to learn, privileged person, to that half Chinese girl with tics who couldn't even fathom those two important parts of her identity represented at all, let alone in just one book.