

I remember the day I started to see myself a little differently. It wasn't anything big, or monumental. It was actually a pretty small thing.

It started with the show Glee.

I stumbled upon the show in my parents Netflix queue and decided to watch an episode. I spent a couple of minutes flipping through the seasons and the episodes,

And then I saw it.

Asian F? What's that? I thought to my naive self. I clicked on the episode and began to watch. For those familiar with the early years of Glee, you probably remember this one. If you're not, it's about one of the asian characters, Mike Chang. Mike's father is upset about his son getting an A- on a test and complains to the principal that an A- is equivalent to an F, at least according to his Asian standards.

An Asian F.

I realized later on that the episode did give Mike some sort of development even though he wasn't a main character. What confused me was why it had to be based on Mike's Asian-ness, or what people have come to attribute to Asian people in general.

Why was his character development based on a stereotype while his white counterparts were given rich, in-depth stories that had nothing to do with race?

I was shocked to say the least. I remembered that B+ I had gotten on a History quiz the week before. I was Asian. Was I supposed to hold myself to the same standards? If my parents were anything like Mike's, I would have been disowned by now. I kept watching, and without knowing, started to absorb the messages television was sending to me.

Other shows and movies are guilty of having that token Asian character who deals with stereotypical Asian problems. There aren't a lot of shows that give Asian people screen time, and less shows that actually give depth to Asian characters.

Here you might be asking: "But didn't they give them screentime? Isn't that good enough for you?"

And I would answer with a simple no.

It's not enough because it seems like for all the hours television producers and film executives

spend on their content, they can never seem to develop Asian characters beyond how smart they are, how weak they are, or how strong their accents are.

And then you would ask: “What do you want then? When will you be happy with diversity in the media?”

And I would answer by saying that putting a single Asian character on a show does not mean that they’re suddenly the most inclusive diverse show ever when the rest of the cast is white. The media’s definition of diversity needs to change. It can’t be throwing in a person of color with an all white cast and sticking them with the stereotypes people like them have been carrying around for generations.

I want there to be diversity that focuses on developing the stories of asians and pushing them past what people expect of them to the wide range of asians that there actually are in the world. We aren’t all just one way or the other. The media needs to reflect this.

My mom works as a psychoanalyst and has a degree in musical therapy. She’s loved music her whole life, and going to school in New York from Korea was her own way of realizing her dream and how to apply it to her own life. My friend draws her own webtoon and uploads it to a website where thousands of people read and enjoy her artwork. I love creative writing and want it to be a part of my career in the future.

I live in Bergen County, a part of New Jersey where a lot of Asian-Americans live. I see my peers stress themselves out to the point where they can’t function, and feel myself give in to that pressure at times as well. I remember all the shows that display us as hardworking and overachieving and can’t help but think that the two are related in some way.

The model minority stereotype has been around ever since the 1960’s during the Civil Rights movement. While this affects us on some level, the media unintentionally pushes that stereotype that Asians are naturally smarter and naturally more hardworking.

That’s the kind of diversity that affects my community. And it doesn’t affect it in a positive way.

Diversity means that you are willing to accept and embrace cultures that aren’t familiar to you. It means that you’re willing to learn about the different people that live around you instead of rehashing tired stereotypes on daytime television.

Instead of accepting that things are the way that they are and accepting that bias will always exist in the media, it’s time to stop the media from sending hurtful messages that tell Asian-Americans that they can only be smart.

True diversity comes from breaking stereotypes. The more culture we are exposed to, the less likely we are to hold preconceived notions about the people that live around us.

The media has the power to do this.

And when more people start to tune into shows that have actors that look like them and act like them, they won't feel so burdened by the stereotypical labels they've been given.

We need to give diversity a shot again.

For real this time.