

Social and personal acceptance in 'does my head look big in this?'



A person's development of identity is often influenced by the perceptions of the people around them. The novel *Does My Head Look Big in This* (2005) by Randa Abdel-Fattah explores how the beginning of discovering one's identity leads to a personal journey which can be plagued by the judgements of one's surroundings. Often, prejudice arises from misconceptions regarding what an individual actually believes. Abdel-Fattah suggests that the identity of a person should not be judged based on their traditional culture or the stereotypes associated with their religion or gender as this can have terrible effects on the individual.

Prejudice occurs as a result of misconceptions regarding somebody's beliefs, culture or gender. In the novel, people hold negative perceptions regarding Islam as a result of the media and a lack of personal understanding towards the Muslims. This prejudice leads the main protagonist, Amal, to suffer from Islamophobic views and discrimination as seen by her hesitation to discuss things openly with her friend through colloquial language " I'm worried that she'll think, Oh, typical Muslim nutters. Locking their girls up in the house" (pg. 281). The colloquial language has been used here to create a conversational tone for readers to connect and reflect on these issues happening. [AN1] This issue of cultural and religious prejudice is further seen when the driver of the bus increases the volume as the radio declares the imperative " Australians are under threat of being attacked by these Koran-wielding people" (pg. 152.). The metaphorical term ' Koran wielding' conveys to the readers the misconception that Muslims use the Quran as a weapon to attack Australians.

Throughout the novel, the reader is shown the theme of teenage insecurities and the standards of social norms. The fear of fitting in and the character Simone's insecurity can be connected to all of the stories that we hear about young teenagers taking their lives simply because they did not feel as though they would fit in or they were made to believe that they were not good enough. Simone experiences what most teenage girls experience at one point or another at that age. She struggles with major body insecurities as she keeps preparing a "New diet" pg. 41 "every week" pg. 42. She believes that she is overweight, although no one else seems to see this "Simone's incredibly self-conscious about her body... really voluptuous and curvy and gorgeous with blue eyes, creamy, radiant skin and lips..." pg. 42. The use of descriptive language challenges the audience to reflect on the beauty standards they are used to meet the acceptable social norms. This is further explored through Josh's character when he refers to the model in the magazine "She is about to snap in two snap in two...you could be sneezing in another suburb...she would fall on her face..." pg. 118. His character conveys the idea about our social norms with the use of hyperbole to emphasize that women/girls don't have to change their body image to be perfect they are perfect by what they are. This feeling of extreme insecurity and feeling the need to reach society's norms can be connected to the daily life of an average teenager.

Much of the time, individuals are not satisfied with who they truly are and attempt to adopt a new identity in order to feel they belong to a community. Their thoughts are often influenced by other opinions even if they entirely disagree with the stereotypes they are subjected to. Amal teaches the

audience that an identity crisis is essential in our lives to discover who we truly are as it says through the metaphorical phrase “ but the point is, maybe people have to go through a lion and a mouse syndrome at different points of their lives.” pg. 92. This suggests that the comparison of the mouse and the lion highlights the struggle between wanting to assert your identity and simultaneously being afraid of how will it be accepted by society, also the imperative “ have to” shows that it is important for people to go through this. As a result, readers understand that the struggle is rewarding. Through the perceptions of media and of our society, an atrocious stereotype was shaped that women who wear the hijab are burdened. Although, the women who wear the hijab sense a connection with others who wear the hijab as well as their faith which therefore strengthens their identity. Amal also feels the connection when she wears the hijab as she says “ I’m experiencing a new identity, a new expression of who I am on the inside, but I know that I am not breaking a new ground. I’m sharing something with millions of other woman around the world and it feels so exciting... I was also experiencing a feeling of empowerment and freedom...” pg. 25. The author conveys the message through a positive connotation and the use of emotive language as she uses the terms like ‘ empowerment and ‘ freedom’ is used to highlight the feeling of liberation in a women’s choice and connectedness with other women.

It is interesting to scrutinize the way that society is currently running, where people feel the constant need to be acceptable by a certain profile. The novel *Does My Head Look Big In This?* conveys to its readers an important message upon the subjects of identity crises, misconceptions, and teenage

insecurities. In fact, it is up to the youth generation to attempt to change the views of society to help the members of future generations lead an improved and happier life, so that they on no occasion have to feel like outsiders.