

Review of *Am I Normal Yet?* By Holly Bourne

I want to try and review *Am I Normal Yet*, by Holly Bourne, without giving too much away because I strongly recommend this book to any young person suffering with OCD. Or indeed their family and friends who are looking to get a better understanding of what a sufferer goes through.

I had two main concerns when I started reading a fiction book about OCD. First was that the author would've got all their information from *Wikipedia* and would write about a character who washed their hands a lot and was a bit of a germaphobe. My second fear was that reading about compulsions would trigger my own. Especially as, like me, the main character struggles with contamination OCD. Thankfully, neither of my worries came true.

Not only does the author capture OCD perfectly, she's so convincing I had to *Google* her to see if she battles OCD herself (she doesn't by the way). The book's depiction of Evie's descent back into OCD is spine tingling. From the sneaky way she carries out her routines, the side effects of coming off her medication to the perfectly rational thoughts she uses to justify her behavior, all of it rang very true with me. There was not one moment in the book where I thought, *that's unrealistic* or *that's so stereotypical*. It was the perfect depiction of a young girl fighting OCD.

Another thing I loved about this book was how the author got across one of my biggest fears: that when people hear you have *OCD* it becomes your defining characteristic. They stop seeing you as a person and start seeing you as a diagnosis they have to constantly watch in case you lose the plot. That is what Evie battles in *Am I Normal Yet?* She's torn between her desire to be a normal teenage girl and the urge to desanitise her entire house and self. All she wants is to be normal and what person with OCD can't relate to that?

My second fear was that reading about Evie's compulsions would trigger my own. In the past I'd read the memoir of an OCD sufferer and found it left me feeling depressed. More worryingly, the obsessive rituals the writer carried out seemed perfectly sane to me. I worried the same would happen if I read *Am I Normal Yet*, which is why it remained unopened on my bookshelf for about six months. But I'm so glad I took the plunge and opened the front cover. Far from triggering me, reading this book actually *strengthened* my recovery. It helped me to see OCD from a distance and get a better understanding of how I must have looked to my family when I was at my worst. I found myself rooting for Evie, thinking that if only she could let go of the OCD, she could enjoy the many wonderful things in her life. I had so much sympathy for her and that really helped me look on my own disorder with more compassion.

The most important thing the book taught me is that hiding OCD is the worst thing anyone can do. Secrecy breeds shame, shame breeds isolation and before you know it you're trying to convince the world you're fine whilst internally losing your mind. Evie had such a strong support group around her and they all wanted to help her. If she had let them in sooner, perhaps things would've turned out differently. It really hammered it home to me that being ashamed of my OCD will only ever keep me stuck in it. Like Evie, we all have to find the courage to stand up and say this is me, deal with it! And when we do, the people who really love us will stand by our sides as we walk the long road to recovery.

By Katy Finn