When I was 11 years old, I remember being so excited to get my hands on the YouTuber favourite NYX butter gloss in the colour “creme brulee” that was said to look “amazing on everyone”. It looked awful on me. I tried to make it work but never left the house with it on, as it looked as if I had ice cream residue on my lips. That lipgloss sat in the back of my drawer until last year when I made the decision to throw it out. It had killed me that the lip gloss didn’t look good on me. Why did it look good on everyone else but me? When I was 12, I finally understood the problem wasn’t the lipstick, the problem was me. I didn’t fit the lipstick, just like my eyelids had never fit the eye makeup looks that were on Pinterest or my cheekbones weren’t as prominent as the makeup tutorial said they would be. The problem was me! I never looked the same as the people in the videos I was watching. What I didn’t understand at 12, was that I would never look like them. When I finally came to terms with reality, I understood that I didn’t have the facial features that aligned with the Eurocentric beauty standards. And I never will.

I’m sure many other Asian kids have felt the same way as I did. It was normal not to see Asian people in Western media and it was never something I questioned as a kid, not knowing how the lack of representation would affect me now. In most TV or film, it was always the smart Asian friend with overbearing parents or the rebellious one with blue streaks in their black hair. Out of all the books I read as a kid, I never read one about someone who has the same ethnicity as me or celebrated the same culture. It never even popped into my mind how good that would feel, to read about something relatable that wasn’t just some teenage girl quirk, but something I grew up with, something that was a part of me. I never saw Asian girls that stepped out of the box and didn’t fit that classic piano playing, math-wiz, future doctor stereotype. At 14, I started seeing more and more Asian content online and through this new generation of people, I learned that it wasn’t my responsibility to make ‘creme brulee’ fit me, it was the brands.

The lack of representation doesn’t only affect those who are underrepresented, it also affects how we are viewed. Why would the small ‘timid’ Asian girl be captain? Or when I tell people I don’t plan on going into business, medical school or engineering because I prefer arts and English, I get viewed as the “defective Asian”, or the “stupid Asian.” A sport-playing, art-loving Asian shouldn’t be a game-changer. I shouldn’t have to be an enigma, and yet because of the way people like me are stereotyped in media, I become that “special one”.  It’s the 21st century, and yet I still find it a surreal experience whenever I read or watch something that connects with my culture. I feel grateful when I see something, but I shouldn’t have to, as I don’t owe Western media my gratitude. However, seeing other Asians advocate for changes to how we, as a diverse culture are viewed by the masses, continues to push me to follow what I truly want to do, even if it’s not what others expect of me. One day, the younger generation of Asian kids will be able to lead, dream, and pursue the thing they want to do, without judgement. Until that day comes, however, I will fight for it.