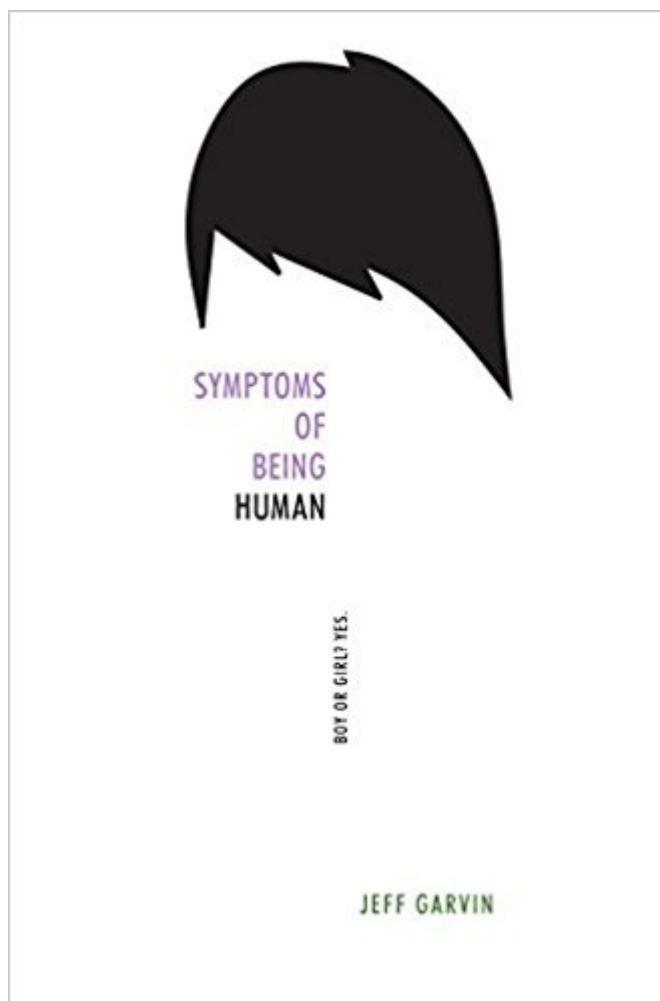


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Symptoms Of Being Human



Synopsis

A sharply honest and moving debut perfect for fans of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and *Ask the Passengers*. Riley Cavanaugh is many things: Punk rock. Snarky. Rebellious. And gender fluid. Some days Riley identifies as a boy, and others as a girl. But Riley isn't exactly out yet. And between starting a new school and having a congressman father running for reelection in liberal-conservative Orange County, the pressure—media and otherwise—is building up in Riley's life. On the advice of a therapist, Riley starts an anonymous blog to vent those pent-up feelings and tell the truth of what it's really like to be a gender fluid teenager. But just as Riley's starting to settle in at school—even developing feelings for a mysterious outcast—the blog goes viral, and an unnamed commenter discovers Riley's real identity, threatening exposure. And Riley must make a choice: walk away from what the blog has created—a lifeline, new friends, a cause to believe in—or stand up, come out, and risk everything. From debut author Jeff Garvin comes a powerful and uplifting portrait of a modern teen struggling with high school, relationships, and what it means to be a person.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up—After a more than unpleasant experience at a Catholic high school, Riley Cavanaugh, whose father is a conservative congressman, is looking for a fresh start at Park Hills High. However, when a new classmate spots Riley and asks, "Is that a girl, or a guy?" Riley quickly gets pegged as an "it." Though the protagonist wakes up some mornings feeling more like a girl and

other mornings feeling more like a boy and would prefer to dress in a manner that reflects this, Riley must present as androgynously as possible in order to avoid negative attention. Riley is genderfluid but must keep it a secret in order to keep up appearances for their father's political campaign. Taking the suggestion of a therapist, Riley starts an anonymous blog about what it's like to be genderfluid. The blog quickly accumulates followers. But when a reader discovers Riley's identity and starts to make threats, Riley must decide if they are ready to come out as the blog's author. Garvin is skilled at truly encapsulating the feeling of being completely without allies in high school. The isolation is palpable in every scene. Garvin's strengths also lie in his ability not to reveal the assigned gender of Riley without turning it into some sort of trick or novelty. Riley is not just genderfluid: Riley is witty, has a charming sense of humor, is a skilled writer, and is totally capable of getting the girl. Very few YA titles have featured protagonists like Riley, who don't fit into the black and white of the gender binary. VERDICT Recommended for any library that serves a teen population. — Ingrid Abrams, Town School Library, NY

“Riley is a smart, funny, sharp-eyed force” (Publishers Weekly (starred review)) “One of the first YA books to deal with the complex issue of gender fluidity|Riley’s emotional life and personal growth shed welcome light on a hitherto obscure subject.” (Booklist (starred review)) “Vibrantly imagined|a welcome mirror for gender-fluid teens.” (Kirkus Reviews) “With a main character who truly deserves to be called unique, combined with heartbreak and triumphs that are universal, this unforgettable book made me laugh, and also cry: Garvin’s powerful new voice rocks!” (Lissa Price, international bestselling author of *Starters*) “Riley Cavanaugh is a sharp, funny, powerful voice for those who haven’t quite found theirs yet. Both highly entertaining and highly necessary, *Symptoms* is the kind of book that makes you a better human for having read it. I loved it.” (Dahlia Adler, author of *Under the Lights* and *Just Visiting*) “A moving portrayal of what it means to be different, yet the same, all at once. Jeff Garvin has written a beautifully thoughtful book.” (Renee Ahdieh, author of *The Wrath and the Dawn*) “An important introduction for readers who know little about gender fluidity and a welcome nod to those who may be experiencing similar feelings.” (Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books)

Until I read *Symptoms of Being Human*, I didn't realize I needed and wanted to know so much more about the issues and perspectives addressed by its story and characters. Had I been aware of my

ignorance regarding gender identity issues, I would have sought out knowledge long ago. Now that I've read the book, I'm inclined to suggest that everyone should (and that they'd be glad they did). The novel's unique, fascinating protagonist is the voice of this coming-of-age story that gets its powerful message across in a balanced and non-preachy way. What started for me as a fun, easy read pleasantly surprised me by how much it pulled me into its characters' experiences, impacting me emotionally in ways I haven't experienced with other Young Adult novels. Please read this book!

I am here to tell you that *Symptoms of Being Human* is YA done right! Not only was I educated about all kinds of LGBTQIA+ issues and terminology that I didn't previously fully understand, but I was also highly entertained while I was learning. These are the types of YA books that I enjoy, those that both educate and entertain at the same time. *Symptoms of Being Human* was my first book with a gender fluid main character. I have read a book with a gender fluid secondary character before, but this one is the first book I've read where the focus is on gender issues and that really explores what it means to be gender fluid. I must admit, before reading this book I did not fully grasp the concept, but after reading it, I really feel like I have a good understanding. I am amazed at how Garvin was really able to take a very complex idea and simplify it into an explanation that is easy for everyone to understand. This book goes into some deep issues like suicide, hate crimes, bullying, etc. There were some shocking statistics mentioned in this book: 41% of transgender and non-binary people attempt suicide?! This number literally had my jaw on the floor. 64% have suffered from some type of sexual violence? This is NOT acceptable. According to a 2008 National Transgender Discrimination Survey, these statistics are fairly accurate. I only hope that these rates have been reduced since 2008 as more and more people are becoming aware of transgender and non-binary experiences. This is one reason why this book is so important, it can help enlighten readers about the injustices and violence that non-binary gender individuals face, thus hopefully creating empathy. I was pleasantly surprised to find that Riley, our main character, suffers from anxiety. I'm sure we all can relate to having some form of anxiety at moments in our lives, but I feel that Garvin accurately depicts how debilitating it can be to those who suffer from severe anxiety. Anxiety is definitely something that needs to be better represented in literature overall, so I was happy to see it represented here. From what I've mentioned in this review, you would think that this book is a bit of a downer, but it also has some lighter moments with a touch of romance, friendships, and family dynamics. The friendship included in this book was so heartwarming. Riley, Bec, and Solo reminded

me a lot of the dream team in Harry Potter: Harry, Ron, and Hermoine. I also appreciated the family dynamics included: Riley's parents were not perfect by any means, but they did love their child and were involved and supportive of Riley. While it is true there are definitely some tough topics addressed in *Symptoms of Being Human*, it definitely ends on a positive and uplifting note. This is a very important book that brings to light *some* of the experiences of those who are gender fluid (also referred to as non-binary gender or genderqueer). Books like these need to exist. If you are fuzzy on these concepts, I strongly encourage you to pick this book up. Educate yourself, so that you can in turn educate others.

I really loved this book. I was so happy that I was part of the Sunday Street Team for this book, and was able to review an eARC from Edelweiss. This book was definitely 5 out of 5 stars in my opinion. This is a diverse novel, with the main character identifying as gender fluid. The story really sucks you in. A few things throughout the book were kind of predictable, at least to me, but I think I'm a pretty good guesser at what's going to happen in a book. I loved seeing the world through Riley's eyes, learning more about what being gender fluid really means. The writing was unique and absolutely beautiful. My stomach was full of butterflies, and a smile overtook my face often while reading. I even cried some. Besides my enormous love for Riley, I really liked Bec as well. Solo was okay at parts, especially towards the last half of the book. Riley's parents annoyed me here and there throughout the book. They were too demanding; helicopter parents always hovering and bugging Riley. I thought the blog posts were really interesting and informative. The romance wasn't very prominent in the book, but I loved it nevertheless. The pairing was absolutely adorable. I didn't find any book boyfriends in this book, but it was definitely still worth the read. The parts where I cried, my heart felt like it was breaking. I don't want to say what happened, because it would spoil the book, but wow, just wow. Some of my favorite lines:

"Why does that make you think I'm from the Midwest?" Solo shrugs. "Where else could you develop such contempt for traditional American values?" and "Ten minutes later we're speeding down the freeway, Solo's hatchback shuddering like a porta-potty in a 5.0 magnitude earthquake." and "As for wondering if it's okay to be who you are—that's not a symptom of mental illness. That's a symptom of being a person."

Final note: Jeff did an

amazing job with his debut book, and I'd highly recommend it to anyone who loves diverse books. I loved it so much that I had to buy a hardcover copy for my personal library! Check it out!

Thank you! As a parent of a transgender teen and an agender child, this book struck a chord with me. It let me step into Riley's life and live it for a few days. This has given me a new level of understanding. I adore and support my kids, but now I feel like I've lived a little bit of their experiences through Riley. I am so grateful for a book like this. It is sending such a powerful and inspiring message. It has helped me to be even more empathetic. My kids can't always articulate what they feel or what they need. Riley has helped me to understand their feelings. Thank you. I am an avid reader and this was a good book! I'm slightly biased about the subject, but it was well written and flowed seamlessly. I hope you write more. I've shared with all my friends in the LGBTQAP community! I hope it helps you sell even more!! '

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