



The Think Inclusive Podcast

Season 10, Episode 2

Mazey Eddings | Neurodiverse Representation in Books

Audio Transcript

Tim Villegas

Meet Mazey Eddings, author and dentist.

Mazey Eddings

I've always loved writing and I was like really, really active in Creative Writing clubs and stuff in middle school in high school, always been an avid reader.

Tim Villegas

But in the books she read one thing that she wanted to see more of was

Mazey Eddings

characters that struggled with their mental health like I was doing. And I wanted to see a story where, you know, somebody was hurting, but they were still able to learn to love themselves and accept love from other people.

Tim Villegas

And so with her book A Brush with Love, Mazey

Mazey Eddings

wanted people that don't experience anxiety to kind of have a new perspective on what living with it can feel like.

Tim Villegas

My name is Tim Villegas and you were listening to think inclusive presented by MCIE. This podcast exists to build bridges between families, educators, and disability rights advocates to create a shared understanding of inclusive education and what inclusion looks like in the real world.

Tim Villegas

For this episode, we talk with Mazey Eddings, the neurodiverse, author of A Brush with Love, a romance novel set in dental school. We talked about why she wanted to write neurodiverse characters in her books, how she sees herself in the characters of A Brush with Love, and what

she hopes her readers take away from the book on how to support people living with anxiety. Thank you so much for listening. And now, my interview with Mazey Eddings.

Tim Villegas

Right today on the Thick Tnclusive Podcast, we'd like to welcome Mazey Eddings who is a neurodiverse author, dentist and most importantly stage mom to her cats Yaya and Zedi. She can most often be found. Laughing That's okay. This is great. She can most often be found reading romance novels under her weighted blanket and asking her boyfriend to bring her snacks. She's made it her personal mission in life to destigmatize mental health issues and write love stories for every brain. Mazey welcome to the podcast.

Mazey Eddings

Thank you so much for having me. I always forget I have the cat part in there. And it cracks me up to I don't know. Sorry about.

Tim Villegas

No, it's great. Not everyone can. Well, I don't want to put down anyone else. But I'm just saying some bios are well crafted in in humor. This is one of them. I really enjoyed reading it.

Mazey Eddings

Thank you. I appreciate that so much.

Tim Villegas

Well, you know, a little bit of, I guess, confession, you know, when when I forget who is from someone from your, your publicist reached out to me and said, I have a love story for you to read. I was like, I don't know if I want to do this. Because it's just not my typical. It's not my typical genre. We can talk about that a little bit later, too. But I was really intrigued by the story and your mission. Right, your mission to destigmatize mental health. So before we get into, like, you know, what the book is about and kind of what you're talking about? Would you just introduce yourself and the premise of the novel to our audience?

Mazey Eddings

Yeah, absolutely. And thank you for taking a chance on a romance novel. I know that there's kind of a lot of like perceptions on what you know that what the genre is and stuff so I appreciate that step out of your comfort zone. I so I like you said I'm neurodiverse I have I have a plethora of things going up in the old noggin, ADHD, autism, and anxiety and anxiety has always been it's funny because I got like my my ADHD and the autism diagnoses later in life. But anxiety has always been something since I was like, I remember having my first panic attack at like six years old in first grade, right? So it's like this very constant thing that I've experienced in my life. And I I went into dental school, I guess it was like, the fall of 2018 is when I started and I was just experiencing like, really some of the worst like anxiety and depression that you know, I experienced in my life at that point. And right reading romance novels was this huge like balm to anxiety, because you had this you went in knowing saying that there's gonna be this happy ending, right? So there was like, less of this, like fear of pressure that things would go bad. And

then I but one thing that I wanted to see more of was characters that struggled with their mental health like I was doing. And I wanted to see a story where, you know, somebody was hurting, but they were still able to learn to love themselves and accept love from other people. They were hurting and continued to hurt, but still had this happy ending, and things like that. And so I decided to write *A Brush with Love*. It's, it's, it's set in dental school. And it looks at two people who kind of have diverging passions in life. And so, you know, Harper, the main character, she has a very, like a very severe anxiety disorder that she, she hides, and it's untreated. And she has like this very strict goal of wanting to become an oral surgeon. And then there's Dan, who's her love interest. And he is like participating in dental school kind of out of this feeling of familial obligation, and guilt. And so the story looks at, like how they, they learn to love each other themselves, and also find like, a passion and love for, you know, a career, something that they're doing every day of their lives. And so, yeah, I think that was really long winded. But yeah, that was kind of where the idea came from.

Tim Villegas

Yeah. And so as I was reading the book, I was going, you know, because I see in your bio, that you are still a dentist.

Mazey Eddings

Yeah, I graduate in May. So I'm really excited. Yeah.

Tim Villegas

Okay. Okay. So, I was just curious how closely aligned and I don't have to answer this question. But if you want to, how closely aligned are you in Harper? Because it seems like that would be the logical connection but.

Mazey Eddings

Yeah, when I when I told my family actually, that the book was happening, they're like, so you wrote a memoir? Like, I was like, No, it's not like I think what was like, really interesting. So it's really not auto biographical. I guess, like the, the portions of myself that I see in this book are like, the way that Harper's anxiety and anxiety attacks physically manifest. Because I wanted to, I was, I was really, you know, I was having like anxiety or panic attacks, like, every day, sometimes multiple times a day, I couldn't sleep I you know, awful insomnia, like, I was really physically hurting so badly. And I wanted to kind of capture how, how consuming, you know, an anxiety disorder can be so that that portion does come from my own experiences. But no, it's not. It's not autobiographical. If anything, I think I was really questioning if I was on the right path with dental school more like how Dan was and stuff. But they they popped into my head pretty fully formed. It's like very unique individuals with unique voices. And I think that was what kind of felt so like healing or cathartic about writing their story is like, it was it was like watching, it was like watching a movie of people that you relate to, and seeing them find their happy ending. And that's how writing it felt. So it's like a very, like, cathartic way to see like, okay, so they can make it through, I can make it through it. There's like a very big separation between me and my characters. I feel like I'm just a scribe, and they're just telling me what I have to put down on paper.

Tim Villegas

That's, that's really interesting. You know, I've never written fiction, but I do love reading books about writing. And so in that is a very, that's a very common theme in writing, especially fiction is that it's like these, there. I'm just kind of the vessel.

Mazey Eddings

Truly, that's exactly how it feels.

Tim Villegas

Yeah, yeah. And so I wanted to go back to what you said about your experience with anxiety and how that informed you writing specifically what it was like for Harper. Because as a reader, it was very evident it was so vivid and tangible. I could almost feel the anxiety as I was reading the, the descriptions. And so like, was that your goal? For the reader to really experience because that I feel like as far as the that's something that's very unique about the book is that when anxiety or mental health issues come up, specifically anxiety in fiction, that it doesn't always is land. And I felt like this. This really did.

Mazey Eddings

Oh, well, thank you. I appreciate that so much. Um, I Yeah, it was really important to me, I wanted to kind of capture, like that visceral experience because, you know, I feel like we talked about mental health and mental illness and kind of our conversations, and I think this is starting to change, but a lot of the conversations kind of have this lens of, it's just, it's happening in a person's head, it's like a very internal thing. And I don't think that's true, you know, and I saw, I wanted to, like, kind of dig deep. And I wanted to pay like homage to kind of the physical and like physiological struggles of, of carrying the weight of anxiety on a daily basis. And how it really does add this extra layer of like, I don't even know what the word is, like grit or just like white knuckling it, you know, I just wanted to like, I wanted to honor that experience, because I think it's very, it's very real for people with anxiety. But I also just, I really wanted so badly to make, I guess I wanted people that don't experience anxiety to kind of have a new perspective on what living with it can feel like. And I felt like going into like kind of a visceral or like sensual discussion or sensory discussion, excuse me about that would be, like a good way to make it relatable, cuz everybody knows what it feels like when their hearts pumping or when, like, adrenaline prickles through, you know, so yeah, that's, that's, that's what I was trying to do.

Tim Villegas

Yeah, yeah. And you also in the book, I think you said at the beginning in your description. Harper hides it, right. She doesn't want people to know. And especially from Dan, when she first meet him, like, she's afraid that he's going to see this and be like, Oh, she's weird. I'm not going to, you know, I'm not going to engage. How did you? What did you want the reader to learn? If anything from like, how Dan and Harper interacted with each other, and Dan, learning about the anxiety and then learning how to support because there's parts of that where he like, completely messes up. How to deal with it.

Mazey Eddings

Yeah, right. Of course. Yeah. I mean, I think like, I think that's true with any relationship as you as you learn, you learn how to love your, your partner, and how to, like in any relationship, you learn how to love somebody in a way that they need and stuff. And so it's a lot of trial and error. And there's no shame in that, like, you shouldn't, you can't automatically get it right off the bat. But um, yeah, I think I'm like, wait, I lost my train of thought there for a second. Wait, sorry. Oh, okay. So I think that we look at, there's a lot of shame still, and stigma around mental health, and even just having conversations about it, right, it kind of feels like, people feel a little uncomfortable and stuff like that. And, and we internalize that as people that might, you know, carry that or have anxiety, or depression, or bipolar, or any of these, you know, things that society so often like, tells us not to talk about. And so I kind of wanted to show that internalization, and like, like internalized ableism, and stuff, because it is, it is scary, to grapple with something as as consuming as like anxiety. But then also feel shame around it, right? Like it, you know, it's kind of like this idea that, like, you should be able to handle your life better. Or you should be able to just not like flip out over all this stuff. And that's just not the reality. Like, you know, you can get really easily triggered by things that life throws at you or it's just out of your control. A lot of times it's a chemical imbalance. A lot of it is rooted in like trauma response and stuff like that. And so, I guess, like I wanted to, I wanted to show somebody that like, I think would Harper's journey is I wanted her to learn to kind of shed that shame a little bit and like, be open with people. And so, you know, Dan is a partner with somebody that was like, very open to learning how to love her best and he like, he feels he messes up and he fails, but it doesn't mean that he's not willing to like, keep trying. And together they kind of like learn how to love each other that way. But yeah, I just I wanted to kind of highlight like the shame that we carry in us and how it kind of prevents us from fully loving ourselves or being loved by others.

Tim Villegas

Another aspect of the book is you you know, not only anxiety, but you kind of tackle other topics like sexism and ableism, like you just mentioned. So it and like, I don't want to spoil the book for anyone, but, you know, Harper confronts a very sexist patient in the book. And not only that, but Dan is with her at that time. And Dan also kind of doesn't handle it that great. Yeah. Right. So, I was wondering, I'm like, did this actually happen? Number one, or is this something that you like, had heard, or experienced yourself? And, uh, personally, it doesn't have to be like, exactly the the, the thing but I thought about as I was reading this book,

Mazey Eddings

I was shocked by how much sexism I faced, or I've experienced kind of in, in my field, like, I think it's very, I don't know, I maybe I'm just like really naive, but I didn't kind of expect it as much as I feel like it's been a part of my life. Patients. The the they, they told me, they don't want a woman dentist, you know, and they request like changes and stuff like that. They don't, you know, trust women, to care for them. I think I've also heard experiences where and this has happened with other people to where. So a patient gets transferred from a woman provider to a male. And the male's experience with that patient is night and day different, like, there's mutual respect, and it's like, you know, they're laughing and joking. I'm like, There's no issues

and stuff. And so there's, I still think that there's like a lot of internalized misogyny and in medicine, and even as, like, people seeking care. And so then it becomes like this ethical dilemma, right? Because it's like, you need to honor a patient's autonomy, but you're also like, but wait, like, you know, I have the skills to do this and everything. But I think even even in the structure of a dental school, there's a lot of, there's a lot of sexism. And, you know, you look at his oral surgery in particular is a field where I think that there's like a lot of gatekeeping against women progressing in the field. So you have some women that are like very high in the field, but they also kind of like internalize that, that misogyny, and they gatekeep, and the way that they interact with women seeking mentorship and stuff. You know, and then, you know, I've had I've had faculty members make really lewd comments to me while I'm working on a patient so like, you know, I'm, I was taking an impression where you have to kind of like massage somebody's cheeks and, and I was doing it to this, man, and then my faculty was like, oh, not a bad way to start your morning. Like having a pretty girl massage your face, right? Something I tell the guys later, and it was just like, I just felt so small, right? You know, it's just like, it's gross. And it like it automatically, like kind of demeans might my position and like my role as like, a caregiver? So yeah, I was really shocked by by that being in in medicine and stuff. And so yeah, I wanted to highlight that, because that was so frustrating, and still continues to be.

Tim Villegas

Well, that's great that I'm so glad you included it. Because, again, I'm learning something new. I guess I shouldn't have been surprised. But yeah, that that is that was really interesting. And then I wanted to ask you, like, how did you feel? Like, about about ableism? How did you want to address it in the book? Because, you know, I think that, you know, well, I'll just speak for myself, you know, like, I've been working through ableism. For years, it feels like I still am, despite all of the people I've talked to you. Despite, you know, me being an educator. I think that it's a it's a long road to undo all the stuff that we've learned about ability. Right? So, you know, how did you want to portray that in the story with, you know, with Dan and Harper and her in the friends?

Mazey Eddings

Yeah, I think I'm with you on that too. Like there's just always constantly unpacking of these things that you have internalized and everything like that. I it was that was like one of the trickier aspects too, because, you know, in, in kind of looking at it through the lens of the story, I had to confront a lot of like my own internalized perceptions of, you know, things that I didn't even realize we're kind of ableist about how I like saw myself and my own role in my own journey. But, you know, I wanted to show, I think like, in a lot of ways we see people in medicine, and we automatically assume that they kind of are above, above, don't know what the right word is, kind of above being, you know, sick in a lot of ways or having, you know, mental health issues, you kind of assume that they have like a perfect bill of health and a lot of ways because that's the role that they're kind of cast in, in society. And so I wanted to, like look at through Harper's journey on how she has internalized this idea that she needs to be put together and perfect or otherwise she's incapable of helping other people and kind of address that idea that you, you can hurt and you can still help people. You can, you can hurt or, you know, have struggles with with mental illness or manifestations of it, and still be worthy of love

and still be worthy of a career that fulfills you and things like that. And so, yeah, and I think just like, there's also this idea that people won't, won't love you anymore, or trust you if you feel like a burden, if you kind of express just how deeply you're being affected by things like anxiety or depression, which is why she was really closed off about it, even with the people closest in her life.

Tim Villegas

Um, I just kept when I'm reading this, when I was reading the book, it was, it's hard because both Dan and Harper, I feel like are searching for belonging. Right. And, like they. I mean, it's so hard to like, let people love you. Because, you know, and so I guess, I guess it's very relatable. I mean, it's relatable for everyone, I think, you know, because there's a part of is a part of you that, like, you don't want to let people know, that's there, whatever that part is, right. And so I just felt like that that came across really well in the book. And of course, we know, we are talking about a romance novel. So let's talk about happy endings. Yeah. Because I honestly wasn't sure, you know, again, I'm not too familiar with the romance genre. So towards the end of the book, I'm like, Oh, my gosh, is this you know, like, what's gonna happen? Are we actually going to have a happy ending here? And so I don't think we can, you know, it's not no spoilers that there is one right, yeah. Yeah. So would you consider this in like, the romance genre?

Mazey Eddings

Yes, definitely. I think. Yeah. And so I think, you know, interestingly enough, there's like a lot of, there's a lot of stigma and like a lot of kind of perceptions of like, the romance genre, right. And it's the punchline to a lot of jokes. And it's, you know, you kind of, you know, everybody has like the same three romance novels that they recycle every February for articles, you know, in the Atlantic, or whatever, where it's like, 50 Shades of Grey, Pride and Prejudice, and then I don't know something, something else, but you know, we have like this very specific frame of mind with it. Um, and I think that that does such a disservice to all that the genre offers. There's so many unique and just like, incredible stories, and, you know, just like that, follow the tenants that, you know, there's a central theme of people falling in love and people getting a happy ending. And I think that's so awesome, right? Because it's like, people fall in love in countless ways. And then we get to see that through these stories. So yeah, this is definitely it's a definitely a romance novel. You know, it's definitely about Harper and Dan, loving each other. And then it's also about how they love themselves and accept themselves and learn to accept love and get that get that happy ending there.

Tim Villegas

What are what are some of your favorite things to read? You know, as a as a writer, like what what else? Cuz, I mean, you're it sounds like you're very busy. So number one, you know, like, how much time do you actually get to read? But yeah, what are some of your favorites?

Mazey Eddings

Um, I don't I haven't had as much time to read lately because I've been on the deadline for a book and I am like, dying with it. So like, I probably haven't read a book in about a month or so which is like the longest stretch gone. But yeah, I mean, I, for a while there, I was like, before I

started writing my own books, I was reading about a book a day, it was like very much like, I need to get as far away from my day today and just like zoom into other worlds and stuff like that. It probably wasn't the healthiest coping strategy. I mean, I guess there could be worse. But yeah, so I think that I'm a huge romance genre reader. And it's what I primarily read. And I think that there are some amazing voices out there that are totally highlighting and spotlighting neurodivergencies, and, you know, mental health and also kind of looking at, like, you know, just putting disabled characters, front and center of these love stories, which I think is so it shouldn't be groundbreaking, but it is. Because for so long, you know, you've kind of heard that like, or not heard, but it's kind of this perpetuated idea that like, disabled characters aren't the main characters. And so some books that come to mind so author, Chloe Liese, she is, she's, she's a romance novelist. And she, she's also autistic, and she writes some of like the best neurodiverse characters and, and love stories. And I think that she is like, just a groundbreaking author, and she has a series called The Bergman series. And I think there's going to be what is it seven books total or something like that. And yeah, so she's done such an amazing job like looking at autism. And you know, she does just fabulous rep. Another author that comes to mind is Talia Hibbert, she writes, actually have one of the books right here, but that that's not on purpose. But it's called Take a Hint Danny Brown, in this one has really great ADHD rep for the, one of the main characters. And so, you know, she's exploring love and, and neurodiversities and a lot of, like, you know, various other disabilities and stuff. And her characters always like coming through and getting their, their happy endings. And then, outside of that, I, I've actually been reading a lot of poetry lately, which I don't know why, I guess it's like, kind of easily, like consumable, you know, wouldn't when you have like a shorter poem, but then you can like, sit and think about it and stuff. And I've been reading a lot of Audrey Lord's work, and Margaret Atwood's book of poetry and stuff, but I wish I read more nonfiction, I just, like, can't focus on it very well, like my, my brain just goes like it just wanders away.

Tim Villegas

I'm curious, what started you on the path to writing? Sounds like? Well, it sounds like you're an avid reader. Right? So that probably is, you've probably been like that for a long time. You know, but you're going through your path to being a dentist, like, how did you how did you get onto the path for writing?

Mazey Eddings

Yeah, it was, it was a really weird, you know, divergence from like, kind of what I expected my life to take. I've always loved writing. And I was like, really, really active in Creative Writing clubs and stuff in middle school in high school. But it was, you know, those were all like, short stories, or, you know, sort of like just little, little snippets of scenes that I would write. And like you said, I've always been an avid reader. And I tried, you know, writing books, and I was just like, I just don't even understand how somebody does that. Like, what how do you figure it out, you know, and so then it wasn't something that I like, pursued or like, made time for as much as I would have liked, or I wish I had in undergrad and stuff like that. That was taking literature analysis courses when I could, you know, I yeah, those those were always just like, my fun classes. And then when I got to dental school, I was just, I really was so overwhelmed and so immersed in like, the teathy world. And like, I, I needed, I needed an escape. And so that's

when I was like, like I said, I was reading like, a book a day of, you know, like, just consuming romance novels at such a rapid rate. Like I was so desperate for an escape, I took up like marathon running, and I was like listening to like, romance audiobooks while I was running. I was like, but that's how I finish those things. But yeah, I think I was just like really looking for an escape. And then I wanted to write a story that kind of reflected like I said, my own struggles are like that and You know, the consuming, consuming this of anxiety and also in this world that I was like so ingrained in but see these people win and get that happy ending and find a lot of passion and and success in their lives. Yeah and so that was the way way it went and then I just couldn't stop writing. So, you know now I think I have like, I know I have like five books coming out over the next two years. So I've been really busy right? Yeah, I'm really I'm really grateful for the opportunity to write I've like nothing has ever felt more fulfilling than then getting to tell stories and stuff like that. So yeah, it's been a real joy.

Tim Villegas

So you're still planning on graduating as a dentist?

Mazey Eddings

Yeah, I'm gonna do both.

Tim Villegas

I mean, that's great. Yeah. Love it. Well, where can people find your book? I don't remember when it comes out. Does it come out in March?

Mazey Eddings

March 1. Yeah, so it's coming in anywhere books are sold. Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Book Depository does free shipping worldwide, which is cool. And then the audio book is coming out. Also anywhere books are sold. Audible, Libro.fm stuff like that. And then if you want to follow along on, you know, this wild ride, I'm going my website is mazeyeddings.com. And I'm on Twitter pretty frequently. And that's like, @foxygrampa27 or something like very nonprofessional right now.

Tim Villegas

Is that like, is that an inside joke or something?

Mazey Eddings

No. Okay, it literally is from that SpongeBob episode, where he like, but I like I made it, you know, back in college or whatever. And then yeah, and then that's how I started like, connecting with other authors. I'm like, Well, I can't change it now. Like, ya know?

Tim Villegas

Foxy Grandpa.

Mazey Eddings

Yeah, I was like, every time I think I'm like, should I change it? But anyway, yeah, so it's from Spongebob episode where he is the hat that says Worls' Foxiest Grandpa. It just cracks me up. I know it's so silly. And then on Instagram, @mazeyeddings.

Tim Villegas

Okay. Not foxy grandpa.

Mazey Eddings

Yeah, yes. Okay. Because somebody took it. Somebody already had that handle. I was devastated. I know. Yeah.

Tim Villegas

So are any of your future books feature Harper and Dan, or is that story over for now?

Mazey Eddings

They are. They're their love story is they're not central, but they make little cameos. So the next three books follow the friend groups. So the second one, yes. The second one follows. Lizzie. And that one comes out September 6 of this year. And she she has ADHD and she gets wrapped up in an underground erotic baking like scheme that just you know spirals out of control. I could not believe what they like let me get away with that one. But they did.

Tim Villegas

Erotic baking. Like underground erotic baking.

Mazey Eddings

Yeah, like back alley. Yeah. So yeah, that was really fun. And then the third one I'm finishing up now. So Harper, and Dan will make little cameos and maybe one day I'll write you know something more for them. But as as right now, like, I'm really happy with where their story ended. And then just like the little tiny progress we see in the other books.

Tim Villegas

Mazey Eddings It was a pleasure to have you on the Thick Inclusive Podcast. Thank you for your time.

Mazey Eddings

Thank you. That was so fun.

Tim Villegas

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