

Book Discussion

Devil in the Details by Jennifer Traig

Glossary of some unfamiliar terms from the book:

Kashrut – dietary laws that are defined in the Jewish faith which restrict diet and food preparation. E.g. not mixing meat and dairy; not eating shellfish. You’ve probably heard someone say, “That’s not kosher” which actually means it wasn’t prepared following kashrut guidelines.

Traif – not kosher

Shabbat – the Jewish Sabbath, from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday; Orthodox Jews refrain from doing any work during this time

Yarmulkes – a head covering worn in Temple or when engaging in religious practice

Torah – the first 5 books of the Bible; the Old Testament

Passover – a holiday observed in the spring to remember the exodus from Egypt to Israel

1. Share the excerpt that you brought to class: a passage that you found interesting and explain what it means to you.
2. Attention to details is considered an asset in many careers: law, medicine, theater, writing, teaching, etc, but Jennifer describes how she was too fixated on the details. How did her attention to details affect her life, both positively and negatively? What other behaviors are considered strengths in moderation but problematic when excessive? What behaviors do you or your family members have that are a bit over-the-top?
3. What strategies did Jennifer’s parents use to deal with her OCD behavior? Do you agree with their methods? What additional approaches could they have used?
4. Jennifer describes how her OCD and anorexia were related to issues of control. On page 94, she says, “there is tremendous power in food refusal” and later she states, “I got all of the attention”. How does this feeling of being in or out of control play out during childhood and adolescence? How can parents and teachers create a balance between external control and children being in control?
5. Jennifer describes how she was the only Jew in her classrooms. How does this affect her self-concept and her peer relations? How does her isolation compare to the feelings of most children that they are different? In what ways did you feel unique in your childhood school or social settings?
6. What challenges did Jennifer and her family face by growing up in an interfaith home? How does celebrating conflicting holidays and performing certain rituals affect Jennifer? If you (or a close friend) was raised in an interfaith home, how did the different beliefs, customs and rituals affect you?
7. During adolescence, Jennifer and her sister take different paths, “I went right and she went left (pg 77).” Compare this divergence to other sibling relationships, either yours or your friends: how are we similar or dissimilar to our siblings? Why are these differences significant?
8. Jennifer uses a humorous tone as she describes her OCD and her eating disorder. Do you think this is an appropriate way to talk about psychological disorders? Why or why not?