

Vow of Celibacy Discussion Questions

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In her vow of celibacy, Natalie promises not to have sex until she figures out what the hell her problem is. So, what *is* Natalie's problem with love and sex?

Natalie and Anastaze are both kept secret: Natalie by her lovers, Anastaze by herself, to protect the anonymity of her writing. What does it mean to *be* a secret? What do these two women have to do in order to stop being a secret? Why have they each remained in the shadows for so long?

At the beginning of the book, Anastaze is a virgin. Is this plausible? What motivates her to seek out a partner? Does her journey to open herself up physically align with her desire to take credit for her writing?

In New York, Natalie breaks her vow (or takes a night off) with Deena and Ahmed. Is this a betrayal? Of Anastaze? Of herself? How does the black and white thinking of a lifetime of dieting factor in here? Is Natalie taking a step forward? A step back? Or is she simply having a fun night?

Let's talk about Ben. Is he an irredeemable jerk, or just a young man who's conflicted? Does he want to be a good person, or does he lack a moral compass? How do you think Ben feels about himself? What about at various phases in his life:

When he's teaching at Easton for a year?

His first year in New York?

Later, in his mid-20s, when he's dating Amber and sleeping with Natalie?

Natalie struggles with her mother's insensitive comments about her body throughout her life. Anastaze grapples intensely with the legacy of her parents and their personal drama, which was so public. How do family relationships shape each woman's journey?

Anastaze reminds Natalie that she forgot to count Julian and Emily in her inventory of relationships. What does this omission reveal about Natalie?

Gwendolyn is another key figure in the book. Is she a believable character, or does she seem too idealized? What does she model (pun intended) for Natalie that helps her on her journey? Is Gwendolyn herself fully realized, or does she have more growth ahead of her? What do you imagine happens for Gwendolyn in the new year? What does her future hold?

How is Natalie's journey in the world of fashion similar to Anastaze's journey in the world of writing? How are their career paths different? How do factors like sexism and other prejudices echo and interact with the challenges they face in their personal relationships?

When Natalie goes to see Tyler's band as an adult, does what happens offer some sense of resolution? Why do you think Tyler remembers – and has even told his wife – that Natalie was his girlfriend in high school, even though, in Natalie's mind, she never was? Does he *really* forget that he had other girlfriends when he and Natalie were involved? Why doesn't she press him more about it? Is this a satisfying scene, or a frustrating one?

Why is Alex, who lives in a very liberal city, so afraid to come out as a lesbian? Why is she worried people will see her with Natalie in public? What does Alex have in common with Ben?

In the last chapter, does Natalie “end up” with Sean? Is this a “happily ever after” scenario? What about Anastaze? Does her storyline tie up too neatly, or is it believable? Is it too open-ended? What do you think happens next for both of them?

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