

The Rosie Project Study Guide

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Contents

The Rosie Project Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1 - 3.....	4
Chapters 4 - 6.....	7
Chapters 7 - 9.....	10
Chapters 10 - 12.....	13
Chapters 13 - 15.....	16
Chapters 16 - 18.....	19
Chapters 19 - 21.....	23
Chapters 22 - 24.....	26
Chapters 25 - 27.....	29
Chapters 28 - 30.....	32
Chapters 31 - 33.....	35
Chapters 34 - 36.....	38
Characters.....	40
Symbols and Symbolism.....	44
Settings.....	46
Themes and Motifs.....	47
Styles.....	51
Quotes.....	53



Plot Summary

The Rosie Project is the story of Don Tillman, an associate professor of genetics at a major university in Melbourne, Australia. Don has Asperger's syndrome which is a form of autism which has created characteristics in him that limit his success in social interactions. Because of this, Don has had many dates but never two with the same woman. Don is 39 years old and would like to be married so, typical to his scientific style, he develops a questionnaire for women to complete to determine whether they would be good wife material. As Don goes about administering his questionnaire, his best friend, Gene, also a university professor sends a girl named Rosie Jarman his way. Don determines right away that Rosie is not a viable candidate for his Wife Project but he is taken in by Rosie's story of wanting to find her biological father. Rosie's mother died when Rosie was small and she was raised by her mother's boyfriend, Phil, whom she claims never loved her and raised her strictly out of duty.

Don and Rosie set out to capture the DNA of possible candidates who could be Rosie's father and the project ultimately sends them to New York City where the two of them become more interested in each other romantically. Don finds that he is able to drop some of his pre-qualifiers and entertains the possibility that Rosie could be a special person in his life, however due to the Asperger's, Don is unable to express emotion and Rosie feels that her feelings for him cannot be reciprocated.

Don works out a mental process of caring for Rosie and they soon marry, each knowing the special characteristics of the other. Don and Rosie move to New York where Don teaches at Columbia University and Rosie is enrolled in the school's medical sciences program. Don is able to prove that Rosie's father was a medical school classmate of Rosie's mother's, and Rosie has some closure on her past.



Chapters 1 - 3

Summary

The Rosie Project begins with associate genetics professor, Don Tillman, weighing the options he has to complete household tasks on an evening when he has agreed to substitute for his colleague, Gene, in delivering a talk on Asperger's syndrome at the university where he teaches genetics in Melbourne, Australia. Gene, who is the head of the psychology department, is unable to deliver the talk because he plans to have sex with a visiting academic from Chile and that would add to his collection of conquests from all over the world. Gene's wife, Claudia, is a clinical psychologist and the two of them have tried to fix Don up with eligible women to date. Don is 39 years old and has never had a second date with any woman because he severely lacks appropriate social skills due to Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism. Don is not able to relate emotionally to people and even finds touch to be painful.

Don continues with the talk, even though he is distressed that he must start 18 minutes late due to everyone arriving late and getting his equipment set up. Don tells the group made up mostly of children with Asperger's that Asperger's is a result of gene variances and environmental factors. The moderator clarifies that getting Asperger's is nobody's fault and Don immediately takes offense because having Asperger's is not a fault and can have some very productive characteristics such as organization, focus, innovative thinking and rational detachment. At the end of the talk, some of the kids begin calling out, "Aspies rule!" and Don is pleased because so many times children with Asperger's cannot project comfortably in social situations.

Before Don met Gene and Claudia, he had had only two friends, his older sister and a woman named Daphne. Don's sister was now dead due to medical negligence and Daphne was a woman who lived in Don's apartment building. Daphne's husband lived in a nursing home due to dementia, and Daphne's knee problems brought on by obesity prevented her mobility. Don often cooked meals for Daphne and took her to visit her husband in the nursing home. Daphne was named after the flower, daphne, and her husband used to bring her a bouquet on her birthday each year. Don cooked dinner for Daphne's 78th birthday and gave her a bouquet of her namesake flowers. Don loved his relationship with Daphne and was also surprised that he could maintain a friendship with a woman for so long. A few years after their friendship began, Daphne was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and joined her husband in the nursing home. Don visited Daphne at the nursing home until the time when she no longer recognized him.

Don tries to schedule time with Gene to discuss the idea of his Wife Project by which he can sort out possible marriage candidates based on their answers to a scientific questionnaire. Gene has to reschedule because he has an opportunity to sleep with a beautiful Norwegian student. Early the next morning, Don arrives at the home of Gene and Claudia to discuss the Wife Project but they did not have time to talk so they scheduled dinner for Saturday night.



Don has an altercation with the Dean of the university over cheating charges Don had lodged against a student named Kevin Yu who should, by rights, be expelled for three charges. The Dean asks Don to consider withdrawing the charge because Kevin's first infringement had been innocent; plus Kevin is in his last semester and had paid a lot of money to attend the university. Don is not sure how to respond because lowering standards would ultimately affect the university's reputation.

Analysis

The author spends quite a bit of time setting up Don's Asperger's syndrome and its accompanying characteristics to establish Don's behavior in the story. Asperger's syndrome is a form of autism in which people lack the ability to demonstrate empathy with others and have difficulty in social situations primarily because they cannot interpret facial expressions, gestures and tone of voice. The author provides detailed dialogue that Don has with himself in his head and it shows the level of detail with which Don makes any decisions. It is very disconcerting to Don when plans are changed outside his control and he adapts but not without some level of distress. The theme of Struggle Against Societal Pressures takes root early in the book as the author shows how difficult Don has it in fitting in within traditional societal norms. What most people take for granted in terms of social interactions, Don simply does not grasp which leads to people not understanding him and even ostracizing him at times. This will exhibit throughout the story as Don's adventures continue.

Overcoming Adversity is also an important theme in The Rosie Project. Throughout his life, Don's struggle to be "normal" has been a polarizing factor and it will continue to be. The author establishes the challenges associated with Asperger's and Don feels empathy for the students who have attended his lecture because he knows what they must be thinking and feeling and the adversities they must manage through every day. As the story progresses, Don will show improvement in how he manages in the world as he struggles to overcome the adversities that have isolated him for so long.

Don admits to having physical pain, too, when he is touched by a stranger. Don is completely aware of his traits and knows that they are responsible for his lack of friends. At 39 years old, Don has been on dates with women but has never been able to secure a second date with any of them because he is so socially inept. Don was tormented by other kids when he was young and has never had any real friends, either, with the exception of his older sister and his apartment neighbor, Daphne. Daphne always told Don that he would make a great husband one day and he is cautiously optimistic about that. Don does have some feelings that he would like a wife but he approaches the problem in a very clinical manner, devising a questionnaire for potential women candidates. This may sound odd to most people who base relationships on romantic feelings, but Don does not have any of these same emotions. The fact that Don wants to relate to another person in a marriage is real progress in his life.

The author also begins to set up the differences between Don and his friend, Gene. Don is socially and romantically stunted whereas Gene fancies himself to be an irresistible



paramour lining up conquests from all over the world. Gene considers himself to be superior to the regimented Don, and he does have a higher position at the university, but Gene's lack of impulse control has the potential to destroy his whole life.

The author has fun with some of the names he has created for characters in the book. For example, Gene, who used to be a genetics professor is named appropriately for his profession. Eugenie is Gene's daughter and obviously named after him, a subset of his own genes. Don's friend, Daphne, was named for the flower called daphne and Don brings her those flowers on special occasions. Don even has a name for Gene's secretary, Helena, whom Don calls The Beautiful Helena but admits should be called The Obstructive Helena.

The situation with Kevin Yu and the decision making process that Don undergoes is foreshadowing for Don's decision making on another issue at the end of the book.

Discussion Question 1

What are some of the ways that Don displays Asperger's syndrome characteristics?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Don and Daphne had such a good friendship for those few years?

Discussion Question 3

Why is the Dean's suggestion to pardon Kevin Yu so abhorrent to Don?

Vocabulary

retrospect, consequent, compromised, evolutionary, paradigm, probability, stimulation, synchronization, autism, obscure, provisional, organic, justification, detachment, adherence, genetics, implications, exacerbated, geneticist, daphne, fanatics, pro forma, blatantly, ruthless



Chapters 4 - 6

Summary

Don arrives at Gene and Claudia's house to discuss the Wife Project. Don shares his questionnaire with Gene and Claudia and they are incredulous about the level of detail Don is looking for in the candidates' answers just to find out if a woman might be a vegetarian or have a tendency to be late to appointments among other things. Gene does not understand why Don's questionnaire does not try to glean more information about a woman's looks and sexuality but Don contends that he is looking for punctuality, IQ, mathematical prowess and non-smoking as priorities. Don plans to advertise on traditional dating sites and Gene and Claudia talk him into going on some traditional dates as well with his questionnaire.

Don joins a dating service and attends a social function and quickly eliminates the available women at the event based on his strict qualifications. At his next dating event, Don meets a beautiful woman but she, too, fails on the questionnaire. Don's last non-Internet dating option is a speed dating event and his questionnaire eliminates all the women he encounters there.

Don receives 279 responses to his questionnaire which he had posted online and Gene tries to help him sort through them. Don continues to reject candidates and Gene advises him that he may have set the criteria too strict, so Don agrees to let Gene pick a few candidates.

A couple hours later a girl named Rosie Jarman shows up at Don's office, saying that Gene had sent her. Don assumes that Gene had sent Rosie as a candidate for the Wife Project and he invites her to dinner at an expensive restaurant called Le Gavroche. Rosie is incredulous but agrees and leaves. When Don arrives at the restaurant, he is not wearing the requisite suit jacket so the maitre d set Don up with a jacket but not before Don wrestles two restaurant employees because he wants to wear his own windbreaker jacket. Rosie arrives and Don thinks she is stunning even though she is dressed unconventionally and her red hair is spiked.

Don and Rosie leave Le Gavroche and Don invites Rosie to his apartment where he will cook dinner. So far, Don has determined that Rosie is not a good candidate for the Wife Project because she was late to the restaurant, she wears too much jewelry, she doesn't exercise regularly, and she is a barmaid.

Analysis

Don's encounters at the singles events are almost painful for the reader because of Don's unwillingness to deviate from his questionnaire. No woman is perfect and Don's expectations are excruciatingly stringent. Things like wearing makeup or having a couple points too high on the BMI chart are enough for Don to eliminate what are



probably perfectly lovely women. It is interesting to note how Gene and Don approach the results from the questionnaire: Gene is interested in seeing pictures of the women but Don does not want the distraction of images when it is only the facts that count. Gene and Claudia try to soften Gene's approach to finding a wife to a more realistic view but Don is determined that his way is the best. The Search For Love is an important theme in the book and begins to be established as Don launches his unusual manner of looking for a wife. In a completely different way, Gene is searching for love outside his marriage and the author shows how Gene's approach is based on shallow criteria while Don does a deep dive on the characteristics of the women he interviews.

Rosie lands quite suddenly in Don's life and he assumes that she has been sent by Gene as part of the Wife Project. Don is incredulous because even at first glance, it is obvious that Rosie would be disqualified from her answers to Don's questionnaire. It is interesting to note, though, that even though Rosie is not a candidate because of her manner of dress and some other personal habits, that the first word Don thinks of when he sees her at the restaurant is stunning. Perhaps Don is able to form emotional thoughts that transcend his rigid questionnaire.

In what turns out to be a funny wrestling scene at the restaurant, starts because Don contests the restaurant's demands that gentlemen wear suit jackets. Don just happens to be wearing a Gore-Tex windbreaker which he thinks should suffice because it, too, is a jacket. Don has a difficult time discerning the difference because he takes words very literally and in this case a physical altercation erupts. What would be a simple request to slip into a borrowed suit jacket at a fine restaurant to most men is viewed as a point of contention for Don who sees the world in very black and white terms. Unfortunately for Don and the restaurant matire d, neither one has the patience or inclination to work out the distinction. This is just another episode in Don's life where the Asperger's creates socially difficult situations for him.

Discussion Question 1

Don's questionnaire has some very strict requirements for wife candidates and he rejects all the women he has met so far. Talk about why Don's requirements are probably unreasonable.

Discussion Question 2

Why does Don make such a big deal about being asked to wear a suit jacket during dinner at the expensive restaurant?

Discussion Question 3

Do you find it unusual that Don agrees to cook dinner for Rosie at his apartment? Why or why not?



Vocabulary

respondent, illiterate, competent, dynamic, distinction, vegan, pistachio, assessment, convenor, anthropologist, compensate, astute, hacking, compatible, arbitrary, belligerent, assailants, proficient



Chapters 7 - 9

Summary

Rosie is exploring Don's apartment, wondering why he has no art on his walls and delving into his CD collection, all of which is very unnerving to Don. After Don has started cooking the meal, Rosie lets him know that she is a vegetarian, another strike against her in the Wife Project. Rosie states that she will eat seafood, however, if it is sustainable. Rosie is temporarily shocked when Don retrieves a lobster from the bath tub and then places it in the freezer to die. Rosie sniffs through Don's pantry and discovers his Standardized Meal System in which he has labeled food that is to be eaten on specific days of the week. This system is very appealing to Don because there is never a need to search out new recipes and grocery shopping is very easy.

Don is almost undone when Rosie sets an impromptu dinner table on his balcony because he has never eaten out there before. After Don and Rosie eat their lobster salad dinner, Don is horrified when Rosie lights a cigarette because being a non-smoker is the number 1 thing on his wife questionnaire. Rosie tells Don that her mother had become pregnant with her during a party with her fellow medical students even though she was in a relationship with her boyfriend, Phil. Rosie's mother died in a car accident when Rosie was a little girl and Phil raised her.

Don notices that Rosie is wearing an unusual pendant with an image of Isis and a Latin inscription that translates to "I am all that has been, is, and will be." Rosie thinks that Don has been staring at her chest but he has actually been studying the pendant and can even remember the details of one she had worn earlier.

Rosie and Don continue to drink wine and Rosie reveals that she would like to know who her biological father is but she is unsure of how to go about it. Rosie knows that her mother had a one night stand with a fellow medical student at a party but it seems overwhelming to try to determine who it might have been. Don calls a cab for Rosie and she leaves but Don is still on sensory overload from having Rosie at his apartment. Don tries to call Gene but he is not home so he tells Claudia that Gene had sent him a completely inappropriate woman, Rosie, for the Wife Project. Don decides to skip his aikido practice tonight but before he goes to bed, he notices the city skyline from his balcony, realizing that he had never really looked at it before.

Don catches up with Gene the next day and Gene admits that he threw Rosie into the Wife Project as a wild card. Gene tells Don that Don is wasting his time with the questionnaire and wonders if Don had a good time with Rosie. Don counters that his goal is not to have fun but to find a suitable marriage partner. Gene suggests that Don not mention the Wife Project to Rosie if Don should ever see her again. Although Don knows that it is not a good idea to see Rosie again since she would have failed so many aspects of the questionnaire, he does see three logical reasons to try to contact her: Rosie could be the benchmark in the experiment by which other women would be



measured, Rosie would be a great way to fill time until Don meets his perfect woman, and as a geneticist with access to DNA analysis, Don could help Rosie locate her biological father.

Don recalls that Rosie is a barmaid at the Marquess of Queensbury so he goes there one night to find her. Don is unaware that the Marquess of Queensbury is a gay bar and is oblivious to the overtures of some of the men there. Don realizes that the other guys at the bar cough to signal Rosie that they need a beer so Don follows suit. Don tells Rosie that she would need DNA in the form of blood, skin scrapings, urine, mucus, fecal material or semen in order to determine who her biological father is. Rosie is not sure what to say but gives her phone number to Don and tells him to call her.

Analysis

Rosie and Don are complete opposites in personality and behavior and it is interesting how the author shows Don's discomfort about having Rosie in his apartment. Don has not had any guests since Daphne left and he is unnerved watching Rosie inspect his books and music CDs. Rosie is more artistic and unstructured so she cannot believe that Don has food labeled in his cupboard to only be eaten on specific days. Rosie is inventive and uses one of Don's white boards as a table top covered with a bed sheet for a table cloth which she sets up on the balcony. Don never goes out on the balcony, let alone eat out there. Rosie has completely upset Don's life in the matter of a few hours and initially he is glad she will be leaving his life in a short while. However, Rosie has had an impact on Don and he is drawn to contact her even though his better judgment tells him that he shouldn't. In true Don fashion, he creates logical reasons to see Rosie again, completely unaware that his emotions are working just fine and he is drawn to the strange, wild creature, Rosie.

The author continues to show how Don operates intellectually and not emotionally or physically when Rosie accuses Don of staring at her chest but he tells her that he is really looking at her interesting pendant. Rosie believes Don only after he can tell her what it says and he can relay it perfectly.

Unbeknownst to Don, Gene had sent Rosie to Don because he knows that Don can help her locate her biological father because of his expertise in DNA analytics and genetics. Don thinks Gene has sent Rosie to him as part of the Wife Project and Don is incredulous that Gene would send someone so inappropriate. Don never suspects anything else knowing Gene's penchant for pretty women and thinks that Gene is using his own techniques on Don.

It is interesting to note that even though having Rosie at his apartment on an unscheduled visit has unsettled Don, he can't stop thinking of her after she leaves and even takes note of the city skyline from the balcony, something he has never noticed before. Perhaps Rosie will be able to help Don see more of the world around him, both literally and figuratively as their time together extends.



Discussion Question 1

Rosie kind of dismisses Don's apartment and meal routines as stodgy and boring, but do you see any value in living simply like Don does?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Don initially think that his evening spent with Rosie is a waste of time?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Gene not want Don to mention the Wife Project to Rosie if he should ever see her again?

Vocabulary

adrenaline, euphoria, discern, predator, leek, mesentery, sustainable, wasabi, roe, static, compensate, disoriented, aikido, refrain, miso, patently, irrelevant, rationale, reciprocate



Chapters 10 - 12

Summary

The next morning, Don is still in shock that Rosie actually gave him her phone number and told him to call her. No woman had ever done that to Don and he does not know how to respond. Don reconsiders trying to help Rosie find her father, the Father Project, and calls to tell her that but gets her machine. Rosie returns Don's call while he is lecturing and the class explodes in applause when they hear Don make a coffee date with Rosie for the next day. At the coffee shop, Don tries to tell Rosie how to collect the necessary DNA samples but she seems confused so they agree to take on the project together.

Rosie has long suspected that a man named Dr. Eamonn Hughes is her real father so she makes an appointment for her and Don to visit him on a Saturday afternoon at his home. They hope to retrieve the doctor's saliva on a coffee cup for the DNA test. Dr. Hughes' wife insists on clearing the coffee cups so Rosie is thwarted in her attempt to retrieve it. Don quickly asks the doctor if he would like to participate in a genetics study and his wife, who is a nurse, draws the doctor's blood for Don's fictitious study. Don and Rosie take the vial of blood to the lab for the DNA test which confirms that Dr. Hughes is not Rosie's biological father. Rosie is suddenly very depressed because she thought Dr. Hughes was her father so Rosie and Don go to a bar called Jimmy Watson's to have a couple of drinks.

Don is startled when he sees Gene at the bar with a woman Don had met during one of the singles meetings. Don and Rosie decide to have dinner there during which Rosie tries to tell Don why she wants to find her real father even though Don sees little reason for the attempt. Don soon realizes that he is comfortable tonight, which is strange, but he can attribute it to 3 things: he is in a familiar restaurant, Rosie is not really a date, and Don is a bit intoxicated.

Rosie knows of only two other possible men who were part of her mother's medical class and could be her father: Dr. Peter Enticott, who lives locally, and Dr. Alan McPhee who had died of prostate cancer. Rosie knows McPhee's daughter, Natalie, and has made an appointment to see her under the guise of seeing Natalie's new baby.

Don has an altercation with the Dean of the university related to a student who took offense to Don's lecture on evolution one day. The student feels that Don made fun of his religious beliefs and the Dean is tired of Don making people feel uncomfortable. Don makes a mental note to try to fit in better but realizes that if he cannot fit in the science department of a university, he did not know where he could fit in.

Rosie and Don visit Natalie McPhee with the intention of collecting Natalie's DNA since she would be a half sister of Rosie's if Dr. McPhee had been Rosie's real father. Natalie does not drink during their visit so they cannot use any saliva on a cup or glass. Don



determines that he could unobtrusively collect DNA from the newborn because he would also be related to Dr. McPhee but Natalie would not leave Don alone with her new baby. Luckily, Rosie is able to obtain some hair strands from Natalie's hair brush as well as a toothbrush from the bathroom. Natalie wants to wait to process the DNA sample from Natalie with any they collect from Dr. Peter Enticott.

Rosie and Don meet Dr. Enticott at a cafe one afternoon under the guise of Rosie's being interested in going into medicine as a career and needing some advice. Dr. Enticott mentions several times how much Rosie looks like her mother. Don is able to obtain the coffee cup from which Dr. Enticott drank and he and Rosie have the DNA they need.

As Don and Rosie drive away from the cafe, Don feels confident that the Father Project will soon be over. Instead of heading to the lab, however, Rosie drives the car to the beach where she wants to take a walk and clear her head before proceeding with the DNA analysis. At the lab, the test reveals that neither Dr. Enticott or Dr. McPhee had been Rosie's biological father. Rosie is out of options because they have tested the men she had ever known about in her mother's medical class. Don and Rosie go to Jimmy Watson's bar for a couple drinks and talk about the probability of finding other candidates for the Father Project but Rosie is doubtful and says that it doesn't matter all that much.

Analysis

Don is feeling elated because Rosie has not only shared her phone number with him, but also asked him to call her. This has never happened to Don and he is almost giddy with the feeling of belonging to a club of "normal" people. Don is still not sure how he feels about Rosie because his analytical mind keeps getting in the way but it appears that Don is extending himself past the point of rational thought so maybe this is how the reader knows that Don has romantic feelings for Rosie. The author shows that even Don's students know that he is a nice guy but socially challenged when they burst into applause when Don forgets to mute his phone when Rosie calls during one of his lectures. The students are literally rooting for Don to succeed and this episode with Rosie is one step toward Don having a better, full life.

On the other end of the spectrum, however, is the Dean of the university. Don has had another run in with her, this time related to a student who has challenged Don on his lecture of evolution and creative science. Don's analytical, scientific mind does not allow room for speculation on the topic of evolution vs. creation and he embarrasses a student in the process of proving his point. Don gets in trouble because he does not know when to back down in social situations, including his own classroom. Most professors would state a principle or thought and let students elaborate but Don is so structured that he feels that he must correct people even if it means making them feel uncomfortable. The Dean knows that Don is involved when she hears from any students who are uncomfortable in a class. Again, Don knows that he must try to fit in and not be so noticeable and he is even a little afraid that there may be nowhere he can go if he



cannot get along in a science department of a university. Don's awkwardness has been a nuisance in social situations before but now it is infringing on his work and he is understandably worried.

Don is becoming more comfortable with Rosie and they attempt two more tries with the Father Project. Rosie seems to take the negative news better this time than she did the first time the DNA results were revealed. Rosie seems to be enjoying Don more and wants to extend the time they spend together, even making a detour to the beach to spend some time before heading to the lab to do the second DNA analysis. Even though Don's behavior baffles Rosie, she is somehow drawn to him and hopes the Father Project can continue despite her disappointments. It is difficult to project Rosie's thoughts, however, because the story is written in the first person perspective which means that the only thoughts the reader learns come from Don who is telling the story. Don can only assume what anyone else, including Rosie, can be thinking and it is not his nature to try to understand other people's thoughts and feelings.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Rosie is so disappointed when it is revealed that Dr. Eamonn Hughes is not her father?

Discussion Question 2

Don is really excited when Rosie gives him her phone number and asks him to call her. Why is this so special for Don?

Discussion Question 3

During the meeting with Dr. Enticott, Don thinks to himself that the meeting would have gone better if Don had better interactions with people. What do you think Don means by this? How could Don and Rosie have benefited with better social skills on Don's part?

Vocabulary

disrupted, inanimate, instinct, beneficiary, cardiologist, persisted, presumably, deduced, imminent, underutilization, egotist, mousse, scenario, oncologist, sway, theory, appalling, respective, strand, credentials, stakeholder, collaborative, nonverbal, convey, override, virtually, brink, stimuli



Chapters 13 - 15

Summary

Don does not want to abandon the Father Project until he knows that all the possible candidates have been exhausted so he finds two photos of Rosie's mother's medical class online. Don learns that the 30th anniversary reunion for the class is to be held in 3 weeks. Don waits for Rosie to open the Marquess of Queensbury the next day to show her the pictures he found and tell her about the reunion. According to Don's calculations, there are 41 possible candidates yet to test. Don tells Rosie that they should go to the group's reunion and asks Rosie if she could get a job tending bar for the event.

Two days later, Rosie shows up at Don's apartment to tell him that they both got bartending jobs at the medical class reunion. Rosie also gave Don a book about bartending so that he could study and know how to mix drinks.

In Chapter 14, Don visits Claudia to talk about how he thinks he may hurt Rosie's feelings when she finds out that she was never a candidate for the Wife Project yet they have spent so much time together. Claudia is impressed that Don is concerned about someone's feelings. The next day Gene scheduled a meeting with Don to tell him not to spend too much time with Rosie because she has issues and Don should not expect too much from her.

Don dives into studying the cocktail book and buys all the necessary items to mix drinks so he can practice. True to his logical processing, Don analyzes the health risks of drinking alcohol but rationalizes it because it does help him warm up socially.

In Chapter 15, on the night of the medical class reunion, Don and Rosie learn that they are to serve drinks, not mix them so their collecting DNA samples on glasses is a bit easier. Because of Don's ability to memorize information quickly, he has no problems remembering names at the event as well as the drinks that each person orders. Don becomes very popular with the guests because of his vast knowledge of cocktails. By the end of the evening, 143 cocktails had been served and Don receives an offer from the bartending boss to go in on a business deal to open a bar but Don declines.

The next day at the lab Don does the DNA analysis on all the samples retrieved at the cocktail party. Shortly after Rosie arrives, the topic of beginning a romantic relationship comes up and Don tells Rosie that she is not suitable as a candidate for marriage and asks why she had applied for the Wife Project. Rosie has never heard of the Wife Project and is incredulous when she learns that Don thinks Gene sent Rosie to him as a candidate. Rosie gets angry and tells Don that his project objectifies women which is something she avoids at all costs and that she is insulted to think that he possibly considered her for the Wife Project. Rosie reveals that the reason she had come to see Don originally was to settle a bet she had with Gene regarding the size of men's testicles related to their monogamy and she needed a genetics expert to clarify.



Rosie also tells Don that she is not simply a barmaid, that she is working on her PhD in psychology in Gene's department. The sudden clarification of their roles and relationship and what Rosie thinks is Don's secretive behavior infuriates Rosie and she throws a beaker against the wall and leaves the lab. The next day Rosie shows up at Don's office to apologize for her behavior at the lab and Don tells her that they can continue with the Father Project without any personal complications. Rosie thinks that Don should abandon the work with her and focus more on the Wife Project.

Analysis

Don proves that he is a true scientist because he is driven to find the results of the Father Project even going so far as to learn bartending to be able to collect samples at the medical class reunion. He is driven in his purpose to find the answers that Rosie wants even though Rosie is not so sure the project is that important to her anymore. True to his nature, Don studies and practices bartending skills so that he can succeed at the event and the studying comes easily to his photographic mind. Rosie, on the other hand, has a little bit of difficulty staying ahead of the cocktail orders and remembering to swab the glasses and saving the DNA samples at the reunion. Rosie is not as methodical as Don is yet he never loses his patience with her and even commends her for her part in the Father Project.

Don begins to reveal that he is capable of emotions when he talks to Claudia about not wanting to hurt Rosie's feelings when she finds out she is not a viable candidate for the Wife Project. Claudia is impressed that Don is able to think past himself and consider how someone else may feel in a given situation and is happy that Don is showing such emotional capacity. It seems as if Don is growing in his interactions with others and it is encouraging that he can recognize that Rosie is different from other people in his life. Even though he may not know what to call it, Don is attracted to Rosie and keeps finding ways to stay connected to her despite her own declarations that the Father Project is no longer all that important to her. This exhibits in this section when Don takes the initiative to look online for information about Rosie's mother's medical class and finds two class pictures and information about the reunion. Don's caring for Rosie is further cemented when he suggests that Rosie tend bar at the event, and when Rosie gets bartending jobs for both she and Don, Don throws himself into the project by studying and practicing in earnest. Don may not be able to verbalize it, but these are signs of someone who is interested in another person.

The relationship between Don and Rosie is further complicated when Don reveals that he thought Gene had sent Rosie to him as part of the Wife Project and that she does not meet nearly all the criteria. Rosie states that she is offended by Don's objectification of women but truthfully, Rosie had considered a romantic relationship with Don and now she knows that she does not measure up in his eyes. As part of Rosie's emotional defense mechanism, she does not share the real reason she is angry with Don and uses the objectification of women as her public excuse.



The author begins to establish the theme of Sacrifice and Reward in the story with how Don temporarily abandons the Wife Project to put his energies into finding Rosie's biological father. Don has determined that helping Rosie would be so beneficial for her life that he is willing to forgo his own needs to help her. This is a wonderful approach from Don, especially given his Asperger's, and he will see the ultimate rewards as the story extends.

Throughout the book, the author has used humor both in verbal and physical situations. In Chapter 14, the author shares an example of how Don's brain processes facts and he is actually pretty funny. Don interacts with a physician at the reunion and says, "Greetings, Dr. Collie. What can I get you to drink?" She looked at me strangely, and for a moment I thought I had made an error with the word association method I was using and that her name was perhaps Doberman or Poodle. But she did not correct me."

Discussion Question 1

Why does Don persist in working on the Father Project even though Rosie has told him that it is no longer all that important to her anymore?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Claudia so encouraged by Don's fear that he will hurt Rosie if she learns that she does not measure up in the Wife Project?

Discussion Question 3

Don takes on the study of making cocktails with intense earnestness. Talk about Don's personality and why this is so characteristic for him.

Vocabulary

presumably, insufficient, influx, collaboration, feasible, assessment, gig, resilient, confidentiality, ludicrous, intoxication, complex, consumption, overqualified, commenced, extraction, coddled, presumably, primate, annoyed, dictate, asset, incompatible, ethnic, novice, implications, altruism, clarified, objectification



Chapters 16 - 18

Summary

Don has received a completed questionnaire from a woman named Bianca Rivera who has met all his criteria. The only obstacle is that Bianca states that she is a ballroom dance champion and Don does not know how to dance. In spite of this drawback, Don invites Bianca to the faculty ball which is only 10 days away. Don practices dancing with a skeleton at the university. Gene tells Don that Don should invite Rosie to the ball but Don says that neither he nor Rosie is interested in a romantic relationship so Rosie will be going to the ball alone.

Don visits Claudia again to get advice on his upcoming date with Bianca and Claudia advises Don to just be himself and if Bianca is not interested, then she is just not the right person for him. Claudia asks Don about Rosie and he tells her that Rosie does not evaluate him as a partner and Claudia states that it is probably a good idea that he thinks like that.

Don conducts a mental inventory on his recent projects and determines that if Rosie wants to continue the Father Project she should do so on her own because he needs to move forward with projects where he can see more results. Don also evaluates happiness in his life and determines that up until now the happiest days he ever had were the 3 he spent at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. Now Don thinks he would have to choose between his days at the museum and the night of serving drinks at the medical class museum. Don wonders if he should consider the bartending manager's offer of going into business together but ultimately rules that out. Don ranks the Father Project as the one with the most undetermined net value while also being the most disruptive to his schedule. Don is also concerned that his anxiety about the Wife Project will interfere with any possible relationship with Bianca.

In Chapter 17, Don arrives at the faculty ball, overdressed in a top hat and tails. Don sees a beautiful woman emerge from a taxi and realizes that she is Bianca. The two meet and find their table where others from the faculty are seated. Don is pleased to see Rosie there and is taken back by how beautiful she is. Soon, Bianca learns that Rosie has spent some time with Don and the two women spar verbally. Eventually, it is time to hit the dance floor and Don is completely out of place with the graceful Bianca. Don realizes that the audience is laughing at him so he decides to play it up and launches into dance moves such as running man, milking the cow, and fishing, pretending to reel Bianca in closer to him. Bianca falls due to Don's aggressive moves and she leaves the ball, but not before stopping to talk to Gene on the way out.

Rosie joins Don on the dance floor to try to salvage the night and she and Don get a standing ovation from the audience. A photographer takes their picture and they continue to dance together until the end of the evening. Don and Rosie share a cab home and Rosie tells Don about the various ways Phil had disappointed her when she



was a child. Don feels emotionally safe and tells Rosie about his older sister who died from medical complications related to an ectopic pregnancy. Rosie asks what Don's sister's name was and he is thrown off because he has not spoken her name since she died, but he tells Rosie that her name was Michelle. When the cab arrives at Rosie's house, she asks Don if he would like to come in but he declines saying that he has a full schedule the following day. Before getting out of the taxi, Rosie asks Don if he finds her attractive and he answers that he hasn't really noticed.

In Chapter 18, Don texts Gene from the cab and Gene agrees to meet Don on Sunday morning and asks Don to bring Bianca's contact information. Don is perplexed because it is clear that when in the cab, Rosie was inviting Don to have sex with her but he tries to rationalize why they should not. On Sunday morning, Don gives Gene Bianca's contact information and tells Gene and Claudia that Don has broken one of Gene's cardinal rules: never turn down sex with a woman under 30. Claudia seems to be a bit surprised by this.

The next day, Gene tells Don that he made a mistake in his reply to Rosie's question about whether he finds her attractive; Don should have told Rosie that she is beautiful. Gene suggests that Don get a book on sex and Don finds one on various sexual positions. Don has always claimed that involving a second person in sex complicates it but he engages the skeleton again and tries some of the positions from the book while in his office. Unfortunately, the Dean walks in with Dr. Peter Enticott who is interested in Don's work and may be willing to make a financial contribution to the university. Dr. Enticott remembers Don from meeting with Rosie when they wanted to collect a DNA sample, and from the medical class reunion. It is only after the Dean and Dr. Enticott leave that Don realizes that he has left the sexual positions book open on the floor.

Don goes to see Rosie in the psychology department to tell her that he has reconsidered her offer of having sex and Rosie tells him that it had only been a joke. When Don asks Rosie when they should meet about the Father Project, Rosie says there is no project.

Analysis

Finally, Don has had a response to his questionnaire from a presumably perfect woman named Bianca Rivera. Also for the first time, the woman is more accomplished than Don in that she is a ballroom dance champion. It is interesting to note how quickly Don is able to disregard his burgeoning relationship with Rosie in favor of a woman who seems perfect, at least on paper. After Don invites Bianca to the faculty ball, he knows that he has to learn to dance, and in his typical fashion, he determines to accomplish that in just the 10 days remaining until the event. It is both sad and humorous that Don uses a skeleton instead of another person to help him learn to dance. The mental image of Don dancing with a skeleton is funny but sad because he relates to everything, even dancing, in a scientific way. Don even engages the skeleton in various sexual positions in order to improve his skills in this area. This, too, has both humorous and sad aspects



in that Don is trying in the only way he knows and that does not include engaging with a real person.

Don still has not picked up on the fact that Rosie is romantically interested in him as evidenced in the way he has responded to Gene when Gene suggests that Don take Rosie to the faculty ball. Don insists that he and Rosie have no romantic feelings for each other even though Gene's suggestion that Don invite her would suggest otherwise. Don simply cannot pick up on any verbal clues or nuances. True to form, Don talks to Claudia when he has issues related to women and she tells him to just be himself with Bianca but Claudia thinks that Rosie is where Don's true affections lie so she does not get too involved with the Bianca issue.

Typical of his scientific nature, Don thinks he should abandon the Father Project because it is not showing any real results. But when Don thinks about the happiest day of his life, the night of tending bar with Rosie at the medical class reunion supersedes his former highlight of visiting the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Don is not scientifically aware of this change on his happiness scale, but the reader knows that Don is falling in love with Rosie. It is too bad that Don cannot identify his feelings and spends so much time confused about his relationship with Rosie. Romantic love can be confusing for many people but with Don, the Asperger's complicates his emotional life and he keeps finding himself in situations that he cannot understand and he cannot rationalize. In general, Don is on feelings overload because all the people in his life want him to think and act on his feelings but they cannot comprehend how difficult this is for him, just as Don cannot understand how easy it seems for other people to dial into their feelings on a regular basis.

Throughout the book, Don's approach to the Wife Project has shown his superiority toward other people. Finally, he has met his match in Bianca Rivera who bests him on the dance floor. For the first time, Don is the one being rejected and he has a difficult time understanding how to process this. It is a good testament to how Rosie feels about Don when she joins him on the dance floor to save him further embarrassment. Unfortunately, Don ends the evening with Rosie disastrously when she asks him if he finds her attractive and he replies that he has never considered it. Don does not have the usual social graces to reply in the affirmative and he succeeds in distancing himself even further from Rosie without really intending to.

Don's precarious position with the university Dean is further weakened when she finds him with a skeleton and a book of sexual positions. Again, Don has not shown good judgment in his behavior in a public place and the case against Don is building in the Dean's mind.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the reasons that Don's date with Bianca Rivera is ill-fated from the beginning.



Discussion Question 2

How does the author show that Claudia is not fully aware of Gene's extramarital sexual behavior without an outright confrontation between the two?

Discussion Question 3

Don is oblivious to his hurting Rosie's feelings on several occasions and she withdraws from him. Are Rosie's reactions normal? Is Don's behavior normal for him? How will they ever meet in the middle?

Vocabulary

criteria, longevity, refutation, notwithstanding, viable, rumba, lambada, triathlon, wary, entrees, unconscious, synchronized, maneuver, averted, gaze, deliberate, notorious, sensory, extraneous, cues



Chapters 19 - 21

Summary

Don leaves phone messages for Rosie but after a month she does not return his calls. Claudia advises Don to move on, that someone else will turn up. Don decides to put the Wife Project on hold in favor of the Father Project in the hopes that some result for Rosie will bring him and Rosie together again. Don determines that the best way to approach the final 11 Father Project candidates is to engage them based on their probable interest in genetics. Of the remaining 11 men on the list, two were dead, two were local and seven were living in other countries. Don begins by calling Dr. Lefebvre, a professor at the same university where Don teaches. Dr. Lefebvre is out of the office for 2 weeks so Don tells his secretary about a genetics program he is conducting and would like the doctor's cooperation.

Don created a fake genetics questionnaire and sent it, along with cheek scrapers, to nine of the Father Project possibilities. Don just needs to find relatives of the 2 deceased physicians on the list. Don locates the daughter of Dr. Gerhard von Deyn, Dr. Brigitte von Deyn and she replies that she will be happy to participate in the study. Dr. Geoffrey Case had died 2 years after graduation and he was not married and had no children so finding relatives presents a bit of a challenge. Responses to Don's genetics questionnaire begin to come in along with letters from 2 doctors in New York who have declined to participate. Seven candidates returned their DNA samples and Don's tests proved that they were not related to Rosie. Dr. Lefebvre wants to meet Don in person so Don goes to the hospital where he practices. Dr. Lefebvre wants to know what Don is really after and demands that Don provide a project description along with an ethics committee approval. Don does not have these documents because his project is fictitious and creating the paperwork could mean hundreds of hours of work.

Don is down to four possible candidates in the Father Project: Dr. Lefebvre, Dr. Geoffrey Case (deceased), Dr. Isaac Esler in New York, and Dr. Solomon Freyberg also in New York. Don knows that the chances for finding a definitive answer for Rosies is getting smaller and smaller but he decides to proceed anyway.

Don receives a letter from attorney advising him that Daphne has died and has left him \$10,000 in her will. Daphne also left Don a letter encouraging him to keep searching and he will find the right person for him. She also tells him to use the money for something irrational.

Don calls Dr. Lefebvre's secretary to tell her that he will bring the documents the doctor had requested of him to the doctor's office personally. When Don meets with Dr. Lefebvre, the doctor thinks the whole thing is a joke and laughs until tears run down his cheeks. The doctor takes Don's fake genetics study documents and tosses the used tissue into the trash. Don promptly retrieves the tissue and leaves the office.



In Chapter 20, Don spends three days at the University Club reading room in the hopes of running into Rosie who sometimes buys her lunch there. On the day that Rosie does appear, Don tries to make their meeting look coincidental and tells her that she needs to go to New York with him to finish gathering the last of the DNA samples. He also tells Rosie that tests prove that Dr. Lefebvre is not her father.

Don locates the mother of the deceased Dr. Geoffrey Case and she is an Alzheimer's patient at a nursing home. Don's analysis of the Father Project projects that Dr. Case was probably Rosie's biological father.

In Chapter 21, Don is shown into Mrs. Case's room at the nursing home and finds her asleep. As he watches the elderly woman, Don realizes that she had no real part in what her son may have done and he cannot bring himself to gather a DNA sample from her. Mrs. Case awakens and at first thinks that Don is her dead son, but when she realizes her error she begins to cry. Don wipes her tears on a handkerchief and leaves with the sample he needs.

Don has paid for his and Rosie's airline tickets to New York from the money left to him by Daphne. It feels to Don that he and Rosie are friends again as they leave for New York to test the final two Father Project candidates with whom Rosie has made appointments. Rosie informs Don that she will select their activities for two of their free days in New York while he can choose the events for the other two days.

Analysis

Don is relentless in his pursuit of getting Rosie back into his life, even foregoing the Wife Project in favor of coming to some sort of resolution on the Father Project. Don identifies the last 11 potential candidates and devises ways to get their DNA samples. Dr. Lefebvre at the university will not give up any samples without proper documentation so Don fabricates the documents that the doctor needs to see. Deception is totally out of Don's character and it shows the lengths Don will go to in order to complete this project for Rosie's benefit. Don has also become much better at acting on his feet as he retrieves the tear-stained tissues from both Dr. Lefebvre and Mrs. Case. The author almost makes it seem as if Dr. Lefebvre is Rosie's real father because he has put up objections which could mean that he does not want the truth to come out. The same could be said for the 2 doctors from New York who refuse to participate. The author almost lets the reader believe that Dr. Case could have been Rosie's real father but it would never be verified because Don is unable to assertively take a DNA sample from his elderly mother.

Don is also developing deeper feelings on what is the correct thing to do in social circumstances when he finds himself unable to assertively take a DNA sample from the sleeping Mrs. Case. It would have been relatively easy to pull a couple strands of hair from the sleeping woman but morally he cannot bring himself to do it because she had no active role in what her son may have done all those years ago. Plus, the fact that Mrs. Case has Alzheimer's makes her more vulnerable and unable to make decisions



about providing a sample. Perhaps Don can relate to her vulnerability because he, too, struggles every day with Asperger's syndrome.

The author varies the style of the book in Chapter 19 when he prints the full text from the letter from Daphne after her death. It is as if the author wants to provide outside validity to Don's character and also show to Don in writing that someone else believes he can find someone to love. Daphne also advises Don to do something irrational with the money, which was highly improbable with the Don that Daphne knew, but Don is different now and he spends the money on two tickets to New York for him and Rosie to complete the Father Project. Daphne would have probably been very pleased with Don's progress outside his safe zone.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think it was right for Don to fabricate a genetics study in order to get DNA for the Father Project? Can you think of any other ways Don could have accomplished what he needed to?

Discussion Question 2

Why can Don not bring himself to take a DNA sample from Mrs. Case in the nursing home? Does this indicate that Don is showing more emotions toward other people now?

Discussion Question 3

Don spends the money that Daphne willed to him to buy airline tickets to New York? Did he make the right decision?

Vocabulary

embarrassment, irrational, sabbatical, credentials, plausible, savant, pun, culminate, reconcile, redundant



Chapters 22 - 24

Summary

On the flight to New York, Rosie asks Don to tell her about his past. Don shares that his father owns a hardware store in a city a few hours away. Don's mother and brother live there too and Don's brother will probably take over the store when their father dies. Don's older sister died at the age of 40 from medical negligence related to an ectopic pregnancy. Don and his father communicate but they're not close, and Don finds his mother to be caring but stifling. Don states that his brother does not like him, probably because he always viewed Don as a threat to his taking over the hardware store. Don does not see his family often but talks to his mother every Sunday. George also tells Rosie that he was the top student in all his classes and especially liked the sciences, but he did not have many friends and was often the victim of bullying. George reveals that psychological tests prompted doctors to think Don had depression, bipolar disorder, OCD and schizophrenia but none of those was ever confirmed. Don believes that all his troubles stem from the fact that his brain is just wired differently from most other people.

The theme of family becomes important in the story as Rosie probes for Don to reveal more about his past. Don did not have a particularly bad childhood but he is not close to his family members, possibly because of the Asperger's which alienates him from most people in general. Family is certainly a critical motif in Rosie's life as she and Don continue their quest to find Rosie's biological father.

Gene and Claudia had given Don a couple of gifts as a going away present and he opens them to find a pair of jeans and a shirt. Gene had also enclosed a book of sexual positions. Don thinks that Gene has once again overrated Don's relationship with Rosie.

In Chapter 23, Don and Rosie arrive in Los Angeles and Rosie can hardly wait to smoke a cigarette. They were able to catch an earlier flight to New York and begin to plan their meeting with Dr. Isaac Esler. Rosie had told the doctor's wife that they would be coming to talk about a medical class reunion. Don needs an alias just in case Dr. Esler should recognize his name from an Asperger's survey so Don chooses Austin from Austin Powers, International Man of Mystery, and that his profession is a hardware store owner.

Rosie and Don arrive at the apartment of Dr. and Mrs. Esler and Don notices that Dr. Esler stares intently at Rosie all during dinner. Dr. Esler takes Don to the basement under the guise of having a plumbing problem and reveals that he knows who Don is from seeing a picture of Don and Rosie dancing at the faculty ball which had been posted to Facebook. Dr. Esler states that he knows the answer to Don's question but he made a promise not to reveal it and sees no reason to break that promise now. Dr. Esler assumes that his DNA was collected when the dinner dishes were cleared by Rosie but he advises Don to not go further with it. Don wonders why Dr. Esler let him and Rosie



come to the Eslers' home if Dr. Esler already knew why they were coming and Dr. Esler replied that he simply wanted to see Rosie.

In Chapter 24, Don has decided not to tell Rosie about his basement conversation with Dr. Esler or about the wedding picture he saw showing Dr. Geoffrey Case at the Eslers' wedding.

Don and Rosie have agreed that she will be in charge of their itinerary for the first two days of their trip and Don will take care of the other two days. Rosie takes Don to breakfast and he finds that he likes the direct way that Americans talk. After breakfast, they window shop on Fifth Avenue and then had ice cream while walking in Central Park. Later that evening, Don and Rosie had cocktails before going to the theater to see Spider Man, followed by a late dinner at Momofuku Ko. Don later tells Rosie that this was the best day of his adult life.

Analysis

Don has come a long way in being able to open up to Rosie about his past. And he doesn't just provide facts, either, he shares his feelings and emotional observations about his childhood. In fact, Don thinks that his father's hardware store is a metaphor for his father's affection. Don and his father were never close and Don showed no real interest in the hardware store, while Don's brother was closer to their father and the brother will be the one who inherits the store when their father dies. The hardware store, can indeed be a metaphor for their father's love because the store will be given in full to the son who has also received the most love from the father. Even though Don has chosen a different career path, it must be painful to know that a sibling receives more affection from a parent.

Although he does not go into detail about it, Don states that he was the victim of childhood bullying, most likely related to the Asperger's syndrome. Even with a child who has difficulty with emotions, it has to be clear that the bullies were making fun of him because he was different and no one wants to be shunned for qualities and characteristics over which they have no control. In many ways Don has moved past the pains from his childhood and feels safe to share that pain with Rosie. Clearly, Don senses that Rosie is a safe place for him to vent and he shares with her without feeling awkward or uncomfortable. Don many not be aware of it logically yet but Rosie is dear to him and he is in love with her. Perhaps Gene has already realized this fact and that accounts for his including the sexual positions book in Don's suitcase. Typical to Gene's style, he views love from a sexual point of view but that is not how Don views Rosie and Don's continuing remarks, and now this gift, seem out of place.

It is ironic that Don has chosen genetics as a career field when he suffers from a genetics-based disease. Don does logically state that his troubles stem from the fact that his brain is wired differently from other people and his emotional and social issues are a matter of genetics and neurology.



Don continues to respond to Rosie with humor and she fully enjoys his sense of humor. For example, when Rosie tells Don that he needs a fake name when talking with Dr. and Mrs. Esler, Don chooses Austin from the Austin Powers movies. This character is an over-the-top person who lives an outlandish lifestyle in exaggeratedly dangerous situations. No persona could be further from Don's own so it is funny that he has chosen this one to represent himself while in New York. The author temporarily lets the reader believe that Dr. Esler is Rosie's real father the way he stares at her so intently during dinner and when he reveals to Don that he let Don and Rosie come to his home simply because he wanted to see Rose after all these years.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Don is able to talk to Rosie when she asks him about his past? Is this out of character for him?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Dr. Esler say he agreed to see Don and Rosie when they came to New York? Do you think he was justified in deceiving them because he knew Don and Rosie were deceiving him?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Don say that his first day in New York with Rosie was the best day of his adult life? What has happened that makes him say that?

Vocabulary

incompetence, subconscious, burgeoning, metaphor, mania, rectify, deemed, sane, alias, quirk, symmetrical, caricature, canapes, implications, perceptive, correlation



Chapters 25 - 27

Summary

Don and Rosie visit the World Trade Center while in New York and Rosie tells Don that his tone could have been more emotional during the tour; Don is glad he relieved some sadness. Don and Rosie continue their tour of New York with popular attractions such as Katz's Deli as seen in the movie, When Harry Met Sally, the top of the Empire State Building which was seen in the movie, An Affair to Remember, as well as the Museum of Modern Art and The Metropolitan Opera.

Rosie tells Don that she had emailed a woman named Mary Keneally who works in psychology at Columbia University and Mary has time to see Rosie tomorrow which means that Rosie cannot go to the Museum of Natural History with Don. They then proceed to Yankees Stadium for a baseball game which Don views as a big waste of time. Rosie, however, enjoys seeing Don doing things that men typically enjoy.

Rosie reveals to Don that she does not trust men, primarily because a girl's first relationship with a man is with her father and Rosie did not have a good relationship with Phil, and, obviously she does not know who her real father is. Don tells Rosie that he knows someone at Columbia, too, and he will forgo the museum visit and accompany Rosie to Columbia tomorrow. Rosie then kisses Don on the cheek and he is not sure how to respond.

In Chapter 26, Don accompanies Rosie to her meeting with Mary Keneally because his contact at the university is not available. Don learns that Rosie's Ph.D topic is the environmental risks for early onset bipolar disorder, a very serious subject. Mary thinks that Rosie is more of a psychiatrist than a psychologist and that Rosie should consider entering the medical program at Columbia. Don and Rosie eventually connect with Don's Columbia contact and he offers Don a job on the staff any time he wants one.

The next day, Don and Rosie visit the Museum of Natural History and when the topic of having children comes up, Don says that he would never want to have children because he would be an embarrassment to them. Don and Rosie finish their museum visit and Rosie holds Don's hand all the way to the subway.

In Chapter 27, Don and Rosie have an appointment with Dr. Max Freyberg whose secretary Rosie had contacted under the guise of writing articles about successful alumni of the university. Don is to accompany Rosie under the guise of being her photographer. Don and Rosie are unsure of how to secure a DNA sample in a business setting but they bring tweezers for a possible hair sample and hope that the doctor smokes so they could get a cigarette butt. When they meet Dr. Freyberg, they see that he is bald and appears to be a non-smoker so those routes are out for DNA samples.



Dr. Freyberg is suspicious of Don and Rose when they blurt out different names for the magazine they are supposed to be representing in their ruse. The doctor makes a note on a piece of paper and gives it to his secretary before she leaves the room. Don immediately starts to think about escape plans and asks to use the bathroom. Don calls Dr. Freyberg's office phone from the bathroom pretending to be the husband of one of Dr. Freyberg's patients having a medical emergency. Don then texts Rosie to tell her to escape from the office immediately. Don manages to get out through the bathroom window which is on the 4th floor of the building. Don finds Rosie in a crowd watching him from the sidewalk. Rosie tells Don that Dr. Freyberg thinks she is a private investigator working on behalf of a disgruntled patient. Don later tells Rosie that he was able to get a urine sample from Dr. Freyberg's sloppy bathroom.

Later that evening, Don and Rosie kiss and she tells him that if he changed his hair and glasses he would look just like Gregory Peck in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, whom Rosie considers to be the sexiest man who ever lived. Don wants to kiss Rose again but she stops him to say that she does not want him to do anything on this trip that he may regret when they get home. Don excuses himself, returns to his room to shower and pick up the sexual positions book Gene gave him. Don presents the book to Rosie when he returns to her room and Rosie says she is no longer interested in having sex.

Analysis

The author shows how two people can view the same situation so differently in the situation where Don and Rosie visit the World Trade Center site. Rosie states that Don could have shown more emotion during the tour, meaning that he seemed a bit callous, but Don interprets that to mean that he succeeded in making the situation less sad. Most people would be with Rosie on this in that showing no emotions at all seems cold and indifferent and that Don probably seemed like a shallow person with no sympathy for the experiences of those who died and were involved in the rescue efforts of this incredible U.S. tragedy.

The author also begins to use movie title to help explain situations and the dynamic between Don and Rosie. As they tour New York, they visit sites that are popular for being in movies such as *When Harry Met Sally* and *An Affair to Remember*. Rosie also mentions that Don looks like Gregory Peck when he appeared in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It's almost as if the movies give Don and Rosie common elements to relate to so that not much explanation is necessary. This really seems to level the field in their communications because each of them has an immediate understanding of those movies. By using the movies, the author is mimicking Don and Rosie's budding love just as the budding love affairs are played out on the big screen in those movies.

Don's feelings for Rosie are clearly growing stronger when he opts to go with her to Columbia University instead of the Museum of Natural History which is his favorite place on earth. And what is amazing is that Don initiates the decision and does not overanalyze the repercussions of what might happen. Rosie's feelings for Don are growing as well and she initiates a kiss on Don's cheek and also holds his hand while



walking to the subway. Don is both startled and thrilled at Rosie's demonstrations of affection. Don goes a bit too far, though, by presenting the sexual positions book to Rosie later that evening and she no longer has any interest in having sex with him. Again, Don views life from a scientific perspective and Rosie is looking at their relationship from a romantic point of view so they still have a big disconnect.

The author uses the technique of foreshadowing in this section when both Rosie and Don get encouragement at Columbia University to join in their areas: Don in a professorship and Rosie in a medical studies program. By the end of the story Rosie and Don will have acted on what is offered up to them at this time.

At last, Don and Rosie have secured DNA from the last candidate in the Father Project. It is ironic that Dr. Freyberg is suspicious of Don and Rosie's intentions but not for the reason he should be. The fact that he wants to block any DNA testing shows that he, too, could be Rosie's real father as the author sets up the question in the reader's mind. The doctor thinks they are private investigators working for one of his disgruntled patients, while, in fact they have deceived him by posing as journalists for a magazine doing a story on successful alumni of the university.

Discussion Question 1

What reason does Rosie give for not trusting men? Do you feel her position is justified?

Discussion Question 2

How does Don react to Rosie's romantic overtures? Is he wary of her intentions or is he afraid to interpret what they really mean?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Rosie no longer interested in having sex with Don after Don shows her the book of sexual positions given to him by Gene?

Vocabulary

statistics, stereotypical, incompetence, crustaceans, despite, deflect, primates, surreptitiously, intolerance, fictitious, simultaneously, descent, inappropriate, configuration, considerate



Chapters 28 - 30

Summary

Don is on emotional overload due to the time he has spent with Rosie in New York. Don now knows that showing the sexual positions book to Rosie in her hotel room was not the right thing to do. Rosie had been wearing only a towel and they had kissed so the book was not necessary at the time. Don tries to analyze his behavior and comes up with three theories: he was afraid he could not perform sexually, he did not have a condom, and he could not deal with the emotional consequences.

When Don returns to Australia, he has dinner with Gene and Claudia and they are more interested in how the time went with Rosie instead of where he went and what he saw in New York.

One day Gene approaches Don in the University Club dining room and questions Don about the papers and photos Don is studying for the Father Project. Gene reveals that he was the one who had taken the original picture of the medical class. Gene points out Rosie's mother in the photo and says that her name was Bernadette O'Conner. Gene also tells Don that Geoffrey Case had committed suicide, probably related to his bipolar disorder. Since Gene had been in attendance at the medical class event, Don wipes Gene's wine glass with a napkin to test his DNA for the Father Project.

In Chapter 29, it is a Saturday morning and Don is cycling to the lab for the last of the testing for the Father Project. Rosie joins Don at the lab and Don asks her what she will do when she finds out who her real father is. Rosie is not sure because she does not care for the remaining candidates that Don will test today. Eventually Rosie admits that she plans to notify her real father as well as his current family about Rosie's parentage. Don does not want to continue in anything that would cause pain to other people and Rosie vows to never speak to him again and storms out of the lab.

The Dean enters the lab and accuses Don of inappropriately posing as the author of a genetics study with Dr. Lefebvre. The Dean did not know about any such study and was embarrassed in front of Dr. Lefebvre who is a potential donor to the university. The Dean demands that Don produce the plan for the genetics study as well as the approval from the ethics committee or Don will lose his job. The Dean takes Don's lab key and the Father Project is over.

Gene visits Don the next day and tells him he cannot believe that Don had initiated a genetics study without approval which is surely career suicide. Don contemplates calling the bartending boss to partner with him on that new bar. Don has also decided that the Wife Project is over because no good has come from it. Gene knows that Don will fall apart if he loses his job and the accompanying structure and schedule. Gene volunteers to declare Don's fake genetics project as a psychology department project and to fake



an ethics application but Don is not interested. Gene convinces Don that he is depressed and has been making bad choices because he is in love with Rosie.

In Chapter 30, Don meets Claudia for coffee and she admits that Don's social skills are improving. Don decides to do further study on the topic and watches the movies *Casablanca*, *The Bridges of Madison County*, *When Harry Met Sally*, *An Affair to Remember*, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Big Country* to take notes. Claudia recommended *Gone With the Wind*, *Hitch*, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *Annie Hall*, *Notting Hill*, *Love Actually* and *Fatal Attraction* to understand the full range of romantic emotions. Claudia continues to counsel Don on acceptable behavior between women and men in romantic situations and that if you really love someone you have to be prepared to accept everything about them.

Don schedules a run with Gene the next morning to tell him that infidelity was unacceptable but Gene counters that he and Claudia can handle an open marriage because they are psychologists. Don tells Gene that he should stop cheating because Gene loves Claudia and Gene says he will consider it when Don makes changes to his odd habits.

Analysis

Don gets a big surprise when he learns that it was Gene who had taken the photo of the medical class and the candidates for the Father Project. Up until this point, it had never occurred to Don that he needed to consider the photographer as a candidate in the Father Project. It is not outside the realm of possibility that Gene could be Rosie's father but Don decides to keep that possibility a secret for now.

Don comes to the conclusion that he did not have sex with Rosie in New York because he could not have handled it emotionally. Had he done so, his emotions would have taken over his brain and that would not have been good because he had already determined that she was not a good match for him based on the questionnaire elements, plus Rosie had told him that their relationship could not progress past their time in New York.

Now that the Father Project is nearly over, Don asks Rosie what she will do when she actually learns who her father is. He thinks now that he should have asked Rosie this before they began the project but they are too far into it to stop now. Things get even more complicated when Don refuses to tell Rosie who the surprise DNA sample is from because she has stated that she will tell her biological father's family all about his being her father. Don does not want to contribute to hurting anyone which will surely happen if Rosie decides to tell her full story. Don is now able to project about hurting someone else's feelings and make decisions that are based on emotions and not just science and analysis.

Don's decision making has been clouded by his romantic feelings for Rosie, however, and he has not made good choices related to the Father Project. All along he has



known he has deceived people but when he gets caught by the Dean for faking a genetics study, his luck has run out and the Father Project is seemingly over. This incident in combination with the cheating scandal of one of Don's students does not position Don very well with the Dean. Plus he has lost his lab privileges, rendering the Father Project finished.

Rosie's feelings for Don have cooled and he realizes that he has been looking at the questionnaire all wrong and it is not a valid way to find someone to love. As is his pattern, Don visits Claudia to get advice on romance and social situations. Claudia tells Don that when you love someone, you have to accept everything about them, but it does not hurt to hope that they will one day change their bad behavior on their own initiative one day. Don knows that Claudia is talking about Gene and he feels sad for her and what she has endured from Gene's unfaithfulness.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think it is possible that Gene is Rosie's father? What would that mean for her? For him?

Discussion Question 2

Why would Gene volunteer to fabricate information about Don's genetics study?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Gene not take Don seriously when Don tells him that he should not be unfaithful to Claudia?

Vocabulary

corresponding, scenario, inept, concierge, sabotaged, contradictory, predominantly, formulate, plausible, interrogate, disconcerting, contaminated, evasive, deception, compensatory, wreak, rhetorical, ethics, nil, protocols, finesse, clarification, disgruntled



Chapters 31 - 33

Summary

Don decides to talk to Kevin Yu again about the plagiarism of Kevin's paper and Kevin begins to cry at the prospect of expulsion. Don determines that Kevin has a good grasp of the material but being Chinese, Kevin did not feel confident to write in English about moral and cultural topics so he had help from a tutor. Don decides not to continue with expelling Kevin and tells him that he will have to write an essay on personal ethics.

Don asks Claudia to help him shop for new clothes and she is happy to do so and tells Don that she may not be around much longer. Don interprets this as Claudia and Gene having marital problems. Don now feels confident that he is now more socially acceptable in appearance and behavior and considers the Don Project to be completed. It is now time to begin the Rosie Project.

Don dresses in a new gray suit which makes him look like Gregory Peck and arrives at the psychology building to see Rosie. Don tells Rosie that he will pick her up for dinner tonight because there is something he needs to tell her and then walks away. Don proceeds to Gene's office and tells Gene that people think he is a jerk and that he needs to stop his infidelity because it is hurting his wife and children.

In Chapter 32, Don makes an appointment to see Phil later that day. The Dean enters Don's office and signals for him to follow her and they walk across campus to her office in silence. Dr. Lefebvre arrives at the Dean's office with the papers that Don had provided him on the genetics study. Dr. Lefebvre is pleased with Don's genetics proposal and decides to fund the work for 4 million dollars. Dr. Lefebvre tells the Dean that Don is invaluable to the project and she should keep him around.

Later that day, Don meets with Phil who assumes that Don has come for boxing lessons. In the middle of some beginning boxing lessons, Don tells Phil that Rosie is trying to locate her real father because she is dissatisfied with Phil. Phil hits Don and he goes down and the two men begin wrestling on the floor as Phil verbally defends his care of Rosie over the years even though he was not her stepfather. Don wants to know why Phil let Rosie down on his promise to take her to Disneyland and Phil said he had promised Rosie at her mother's funeral and then he went into rehab for 8 months and assumed Rosie had forgotten about it.

Before leaving his apartment that night, Don puts an important envelope in his jacket pocket and a small box in his pants pocket. Checking his whiteboard one last time, Don sets out to close the Rosie Project.

In Chapter 33, Don stops at a florist and buys a dozen red roses and heads to Rosie's apartment. Of course Rosie is running late and Rosie comments on how different Don looks. The taxi delivers them to Le Gavroche where Don has made a reservation. Don



proposes to Rosie and she declines because even though Don has changed, she does not think that Don is capable of feeling love. Rosie loves Don but tells him that she cannot see him anymore because he cannot really love her. Gene and Claudia arrive to celebrate Don's birthday which Rosie had not known. Rosie leaves the restaurant upset and Don decides to walk home in the rain.

Analysis

The Dean had told Don that if he withdraws his plagiarism complaint against Kevin Yu, Don will be able to keep his job. In light of Don's recent deceptive activity related to the Father Project, Don feels that it would be hypocritical for him to punish Kevin when he himself has not behaved with complete integrity lately. Don listens to Kevin's story and the impact of his having to return to China in shame if he should be expelled. Don thinks to himself, "In the past, I would have regarded this as irrelevant. A rule had been broken. But now I was also a rule breaker. I had not broken the rules deliberately, or at least not with any conscious thought. Perhaps Kevin's behavior had been similarly unconsidered." Don's newfound empathy is something that would have never come to play just a few months ago. By becoming vested in Rosie's situation and trying to help her, Don knows that people are capable of things they may have never considered before because they want to help someone they love. Sometimes, too, there are just simple misunderstandings. In Kevin's situation, his being Chinese meant that he was not comfortable writing social and cultural issues in English. Straightforward English accommodates scientific thought but Kevin was not comfortable translating more complicated thought and chose to borrow statements from a tutor's paper. Kevin knew the material but was uneasy in his communication skills. Don's consideration of the difference in cultures will go a long way in sending Kevin off to a bright future instead of heading back home to China in shame.

Don finishes his transformation to what he thinks will be a more socially acceptable person as well as a romantic partner candidate with Rosie. Don has tried to do everything that will make himself more attractive to Rosie including buying a gray suit and new glasses as well as getting a new haircut to make himself look like Gregory Peck in *To Kill a Mockingbird* because Rosie thinks that Peck was the sexiest man who ever lived. Don has adopted a suave new manner too and tells--not asks--Rosie that he is taking her to dinner. Don also confronts Gene about Gene's continuing infidelity and how damaging it is to Gene's wife and children. Up to this point, Don has kept quiet about Gene's inappropriate behavior because they are friends and because Gene has a higher position at the university, but now Don has experienced Claudia's pain and feels emboldened to address the issue on her behalf.

Don's compassion is clearly exhibiting in multiple ways and he feels more confident about being a "normal" person than he ever has before. This allows him to also address Phil's treatment of Rosie when Don goes to Phil's gym. Don learns that there were extenuating circumstances in Rosie and Phil's relationship and Don wishes that Rosie had told him the complete story. In all fairness to Rosie, though, she was just a little girl when her mother died and Phil made promises he did not keep, even though he thought



he had valid reasons. A child, however, does not understand those adult issues and Phil should have revisited the promise made to take Rosie to Disneyland when he was in a better place after his rehab.

Ironically, Rosie now loves Don but feels that she cannot accept his marriage proposal because he is incapable of knowing what love feels like. For so long, Rosie resisted the idea of being in love with Don and now that he has made the ultimate declaration of love, Rosie feels that she cannot accept because it would be false.

Discussion Question 1

Why has Don decided to treat Kevin Yu with more compassion regarding the plagiarism issue?

Discussion Question 2

Don mentions the Don Project for the first time in Chapter 31. What does the Don Project consist of?

Discussion Question 3

According to Don, what is the Rosie Project?

Vocabulary

integrity, unethical, expulsion, reprieve, ecstatic, mentor, persona, rigorous, tenured, compelling, waiver, apologetic, maitre d, protocol



Chapters 34 - 36

Summary

At home, Don drinks some tequila and watches Casablanca to try to understand why people think the movie is so sad. Claudia and Gene arrive to see if Don is OK but Don will not let them in. Don returns a voice message to his family who wish him a happy birthday. Don sips tequila and evaluates that now at the age of 40, he is better equipped to navigate in the world and that is all thanks to the Rosie Project. Don has learned 7 major things about himself but feels melancholy which he feels is the effect of the disastrous evening and Rosie's refusal of his marriage proposal.

In Chapter 35, Don wakes up in the chair on the balcony and begins to evaluate his position to embark on the next half of his life. Don now knows 4 things about himself: he is wired differently due to Asperger's syndrome; his lack of empathy accounts for his not being able to relate to film characters and others in real life; his reduced ability to empathize does not mean he has an inability to love; and in spite of Rosie's failing many criteria of the Wife Project, he is in love with her.

When Don arrives at his office, he finds a note from Rosie telling Don that she is sorry for her behavior and she thinks she knows that Gene is her real father. Don rushes to a breakfast meeting attended by both Gene and Rosie and Don tells Rosie that he still wants to be with her even though she has not met all the criteria in the Wife Project. Rosie tells Don that she loves him, too, but she has been afraid because Don is so different from other people. Rosie accepts the diamond ring from Don and everyone in the University Club dining room applauds. Phil enters the room with two police officers and punches Gene in the jaw based on Rosie's telling him that Gene is probably her real father and had seduced Rosie's mother when she was Phil's girlfriend. Before Don and Rosie leave, Don shows Rosie tickets to Disneyland he has purchased so they can go and take Don.

In Chapter 36, Rosie, Phil and Don go to Disneyland and have a great time. Rosie and Don are married and move to New York where Don works in the Department of Genetics at Columbia University and Rosie is in her first year of medical school there. Don and Rosie work in a cocktail bar three nights a week for fun. Don has overcome his aversion to body contact and is able to be intimate with Rosie. Don also attends a therapy session every week for ongoing work on his social skills. Dr. Eamonn Hughes has told Don some things about Phil and everything becomes clear to Don about who Rosie's real father is.

Don has lab privileges at Columbia and tests the remaining DNA samples that he had not been able to process while in Australia. Don contacts Rosie to join him for the test results. Rosie had not known that Don had taken a sample of the blood-stained shirt Phil was wearing when he and Don fought in the gym one day. The DNA test reveals that Phil is Rosie's biological father



Analysis

Don cannot understand why people think the movie *Casablanca* is so sad. He knows that he is supposed to feel bad because the two characters are in love and cannot be together but Don cannot force an emotional reaction.

In Chapter 36, Dr. Eamonn Hughes, who has been ruled out as a candidate in the Father Project, reveals some things about Phil and it is now that Don can put together all the pieces of who Rose's real father is.

Don evaluates himself at this point and realizes 7 things: he does not need to be visibly odd and can move about among "normal" people; he has memory and focus skills that others do not; he can enjoy friendship and good times; he can enjoy the company of women; the Wife Project is fundamentally sound and not much different from what matchmakers do; he is not wired to feel love; and he has a vast knowledge of many things but cannot fix himself. Although this may sound like a depressing list, Don has made huge strides in self-realization and movement toward better relationships with people. Don is now able to care and extend himself in empathy which is something he could not do before. All in all, Don is happy with himself and the progress he has made and he owes it all to Rose and the Rosie Project.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Don attribute his newfound social skills to the Rosie Project?

Discussion Question 2

Does it make sense that Don had to complete the Don Project before he could complete the Rosie Project?

Discussion Question 3

Are you surprised to learn that Phil is Rosie's biological father? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

engrossing, pedantic, enzymes, exploit, empathy, contingency, criterion, alternative, fictitious, assault, rationale, ceased, predisposition, hypothesis

Characters

Don Tillman

Don Tillman is an Associate Professor of genetics at a major university in Melbourne, Australia. He has Asperger's syndrome which is a form of autism which has created characteristics in him that limit his success in social interactions. Because of this, Don has had many dates but never two with the same woman. Don is 39 years old and would like to be married so, typical to his scientific style, he develops a questionnaire for women to complete to determine whether they would be good wife material. Don is very accomplished in science, cooking, Akikido and music but has difficulties in human relationships. Don approaches every problem from a scientific point of view and has few friends because Don has difficulty interpreting facial expressions and sensing human emotions.

When Rosie Jarman comes into his life, Don finds himself wanting to spend more time with her in spite of her not meeting many of the criteria on his questionnaire used to find a marital partner. Don is able to communicate with his best friend, Gene, the head of the psychology department and Gene's wife, Claudia, a clinical psychologist. Don seeks their advice when it comes to social and romantic matters and they try to help him grow emotionally so that he can achieve his goal of finding a wife.

Rosie Jarman

Rosie Jarman is a wild card thrown into Don Tillman's very regimented life. Rosie is a barmaid with shocking red hair who wears clothing that runs toward the bohemian style with lots of jewelry as accessories. Rosie is perpetually late to events, is a smoker, and has a very direct way of speaking. According to Don, Rosie is a stunning woman but she fails too many criteria on his questionnaire for marriage partner candidates.

Rosie's mother died when Rosie was only 8 years old and Rosie was raised by her mother's boyfriend, Phil. Rosie feels that Phil never really loved her but raised her out of a sense of obligation. Rosie meets Don, a genetics professor, and tells him that she wants to find out who her real father is. In spite of mental warning bells, Don agrees to help Rosie and they set out to determine Rosie's biological father. Rosie is both attracted to and repulsed by Don's odd mannerisms and distant way of relating to people.

Eventually, it is revealed that Rosie is not only a barmaid but also a Psychology Ph.d student in Gene's department at the university. Rosie tries to lean into her feelings for Don as they spend more time together on the Father Project but Don is oblivious to Rosie's overtures. Sometimes, Don takes the initiative in the romance department and Rosie resists because she does not think that Don is capable of knowing what real love



feels like. Ultimately, Rosie overcomes her resistance to Don's quirks and focuses on what she loves about him and they marry, each realizing the other's shortcomings.

Gene

Gene is Don's good friend and he attempts to help Don process his social interactions especially as they relate to women. Gene met Don when they were both in the genetics department of a major university. Gene was promoted to head of the psychology department but he and Don remained friends. Gene is a womanizer and is always on the prowl for new women, even keeping a global map with pins indicating the nationalities of the women he has seduced. Gene is the antithesis of Don because he is always viewing women as sexual objects while Don takes a more intellectual and scientific approach to meeting women.

Claudia

Claudia is Gene's wife. She is a clinical psychologist who tries to help Don work through some of his social and emotional issues especially related to dating women and knowing how to interact with Rosie. Claudia is aware of her husband's infidelities and lets Don know that she has about reached the end of her tolerance with Gene. Amazingly, Don is able to intuit Claudia's emotional pain and he intervenes in order to save Gene and Claudia's marriage.

Phil

Phil is Rosie's mother's boyfriend. Phil raised Rosie after her mother died when Rosie was only 8 years old. Rosie has always resented Phil and never thought that he really loved her, he was just caring for her out of some sense of duty. At the end of the novel, it is revealed that Phil is actually Rosie's biological father.

Eva

Eva is the woman who cleans Don's apartment. Gene recommends that Don contact Eva for her services but Don is not to mention Gene's name, implying that Gene and Eva had once had a relationship that ended badly. Don refers to Eva in his mind as Eva, the short-skirted cleaner.

The Dean

The Dean of the University is a 50-year-old woman whose main interest is securing funding for the university. The Dean does not agree with all of Don's teaching methods and the two have a slightly adversarial relationship.



Julie

Julie is a minor character at the beginning of the book. She is the organizer of the event at which Don delivers his talk about Asperger's syndrome. Julie would have liked to get to know Don better but Don is put off by her abrasive and aggressive nature and declines Julie's invitations to see each other outside the professional setting.

Eugenie

Eugenie is a minor character in the story. She is the 8-year-old daughter of Gene and Claudia and she enjoys riding on Don's shoulders when she sees him.

Carl

Carl is a minor character in the story. Carl is Gene's 16-year-old son and he has a playful relationship with Don, sometimes wrestling each other to the ground in fun.

Daphne

Prior to his friendship with Gene and Claudia, Daphne was one of two of Don's only friends. Daphne lived in Don's apartment building but obesity and bad knees limited her mobility, so Don helped her with errands and cooking. Don also took Daphne to the nursing home to visit her husband who had dementia. Don's friendship with Daphne continued for about three years until Daphne was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and moved to the nursing home. Don continued to visit Daphne at the home until she no longer recognized him.

Michelle

Don's sister had been one of his only two friends until he met Gene and Claudia. She does not have a role in the story other than she was one person that Don could relate to and she could relate to him. Don's sister died due to medical incompetence. Later in the story it is revealed that Don's sister's name was Michelle.

Fabienne

Fabienne appears briefly as a woman at one of the singles events. She is an aggressive French woman, and while beautiful, she fails Don's questionnaire.



Bianca Rivera

Bianca Rivera is the only woman who has successfully met Don's criteria in the Wife Projects. Bianca is a ballroom dance champion and Don cannot dance so their relationship ends as soon as it begins at the faculty ball where Don's incompetence humiliates Bianca and she leaves.



Symbols and Symbolism

Asperger's Syndrome

Asperger's syndrome is a form of autism in which people have difficulty in social situations, understanding emotions and having any changes to their routines.

The Wife Project

The Wife Project is Don Tillman's scientific methodology of developing a questionnaire to be completed by potential marriage candidates so that he may find a suitable spouse.

The Father Project

The Father Project is Don Tillman's attempt to help Rosie find her biological father.

Responsible Service of Alcohol Certificate

Don studies bartending in order to get a Responsible Service of Alcohol Certificate so he can tend bar at the physicians' meeting.

Bicycle

Don travels everywhere he needs to go around the city on his bicycle.

Standardized Meal System

Don has implemented a Standardized Meal System in which he eats the same foods on the same days every week. He finds the efficiency to be comforting because he does not have to search out other foods to prepare and it makes grocery shopping very simple.

Pendant

Don notices that Rosie wears an unusual pendant with an image of Isis and an inscription, "Sum omnia quae fuerunt suntque eruntque ego," which translates from Latin to "I am all that has been, is, and will be."



Aikido

Aikido is a Japanese martial art that Don practices as a form of physical and emotional exercise.

Questionnaire

Don's questionnaire is the scientific method he tries to use to find possible marriage candidates for himself.

Phil's shirt

After Don has a fight with Phil, Don is able to take Phil's bloodied shirt and conduct a DNA test on it. This test proves that Phil is Rosie's biological father and Rosie can have some closure in her life.



Settings

Melbourne

Melbourne is a city in Australia and the main setting for the story.

Jimmy Watson's Bar

Jimmy Watson's Bar is where Don takes Rosie a couple times to have a drink while they discuss the Father Project.

Marquess of Queensbury

The Marquess of Queensbury is the gay bar where Rosie works as a barmaid.

New York City

Don and Rosie go to New York to collect DNA samples from two candidates in the Father Project. They essentially fall in love while there and move there after they get married.

The University Club

The University Club has a dining room for professors where Don and Gene meet over meals. Don also talks to Rosie there sometimes even though Rosie does not have privileges to eat there.

Columbia University

Don and Rosie meet colleagues at Columbia University when they visit New York City. At the end of the story, Don is teaching genetics at Columbia and Rosie is enrolled at the university's school of medicine.



Themes and Motifs

The Search for Love

The search for love is one of the most common themes in literature. Every human being has basic needs, some are physical such as food and air, but there is also the need to be loved, validated and wanted just for being himself or herself. There are two obvious threads of the search for love in the Rosie Project: the Wife Project and the Father Project. Don Tillman is a 39-year-old man who wants to be married but he has social and romantic interaction issues due to Asperger's syndrome. Don's scientific nature guides him to create a questionnaire to be answered by possible romantic partners, yet Don finds them all lacking in some way. Don is at first perplexed because he solves every problem in his life with a scientific approach but the Wife Project fails miserably. Don is attracted to Rosie in spite of her characteristics and behavior that do not meet his exacting specifications. There is almost a primal factor involved in Don's attraction to Rosie since he is incapable of understanding love or knowing what it feels like. Don perseveres in spite of the odds, though, and even creates the Father Project to help Rosie locate her biological father just so that he can stay close to her.

Rosie's search for love is not a romantic one, but rather the search to find her biological father and the source of love that should reside there. Rosie's mother died when Rosie was only 8-years-old, so Rosie lost that critical source of love in her life. Rosie has been raised by Phil, her mother's boyfriend, and Rosie has not been happy with their relationship because she feels Phil raised her not out of love but out of a sense of duty. Rosie's quest to find her biological father is a hopeful one because she wishes to find the real love that she feels has been denied to her since she was a girl. Ironically, during the administration of the Father Project, Rosie falls in love with Don and ultimately finds romantic love. Don is then able to help Rosie identify her real father who turns out to be Phil and Rosie's search for love is complete.

Struggle Against Societal Pressure

The struggle against societal pressure is an important theme in literature. It seems as if most people encounter times in their lives when they feel counter to what society dictates is the correct behavior. Many times, what society states is best for human behavior is counter to the individual's thoughts and feelings and both internal and external conflict can arise. In The Rosie Project, Don Tillman has always struggled against what society says is acceptable. Don has Asperger's syndrome which is a form of autism which does not allow Don to interact in what are socially condoned behaviors. Don is unable to read facial expressions or intuit emotions so it is difficult for Don to develop friendships. Don is considered to be odd by most people who do not understand the scope of Asperger's. Don tries to do socially acceptable things like date women but he never gets a second date because the women are put off by his quirks and scientific approach to life.



Don even finds societal pressure in his work life when the Dean does not understand his behavior and thinks he is unsuitable for his position. Don is pressured by the Dean to behave more compassionately and Don is not sure what she means or how he can do that. Don is counseled by his friend, Gene, and Gene's wife, Claudia, in how to behave to appear more socially acceptable, especially when it comes to relating to women. By the end of the book, Don has advanced in his personal and professional relationships due to coaching and positive reinforcement of good behavior. Don will probably struggle with fitting into society for the rest of his life but he is now aware that he has to be more conscious of his behavior and make a concerted effort to avoid social faux pas in the future.

Family

The theme of family is an important one in literature. Every character has a story and it started with his or her family. Despite the extension of a character's life, much of the emotional and psychological make up of a person relates back to the family. In Don's case, he has a distant relationship with his family physically and emotionally. Don lives a few hours away from his family and does not see them very often. In fact, when Don drives the long distance to find the mother of a dead physician in the story, he is close to where his family lives but he decides not to stop to see them because visits are always difficult. Don grew up in a family of five; hardworking parents, an older sister who has died, and a younger, spoiled brother. Don's father owns a hardware store and Don's brother will probably inherit it when Don's father dies because Don has no real interest in the business. Don's relationship with his brother has always been strained because the brother thinks that Don is a threat to his inheriting the hardware store. Don and his father have always had a civil, but strained, relationship while Don's mother has been loving but slightly stifling. Don's sister died due to medical negligence related to an ectopic pregnancy and Don and his mother have been hit the hardest by her death. Because Don has reached the age of 40 and has never married, Don's family members jump to the conclusion that he is gay and they are willing to accept any person Don loves.

Rosie's family story is sad, too, but for different reasons. Rosie's mother died when Rosie was only 8-years-old and Rosie grew up without knowing a mother's influence. Rosie was raised by her mother's boyfriend, Phil, but Rosie always felt that he was not a good example of a father figure. Rosie thinks that if she can find her biological father, she will be complete in some way and find the love that she feels has been missing from her life.

Gene and Claudia's family dynamic is compromised too because of their open marriage. Gene has been married before and has a son and Gene and Claudia have a daughter together. Gene's infidelity is taking a toll on his marriage to Claudia and his children are old enough to see that his behavior is putting the family in jeopardy because Claudia is no longer willing to tolerate their arrangement.



Overcoming Adversity

Overcoming adversity is an important theme in literature. Many times authors show how a character can persevere against odds stacked against him or her and the reader is always happy when the character comes out on top. In *The Rosie Project*, Don has had to work hard to overcome the effects of Asperger's syndrome on his personal and professional life. Don's inability to relate to people causes them to think that he is odd and quirky. Don sees everything in life from a scientific perspective and really sees no need for the messiness of emotions that other people seem to get caught up in. Conversely, other people see Don and others like him as having major problems or faults, even though there is nothing these people can do about it. Having Asperger's syndrome or autism is a neurological problem and people bravely live with it every day. Don gets angry at a speaking event when the moderator states that having Asperger's is something a person is born with and it is nobody's fault. Don says, "Fault! Asperger's isn't a fault, it's a variant. It's potentially a major advantage. Asperger's syndrome is associated with organization, focus, innovative thinking, and rational detachment." Don is a champion for people with Asperger's, especially the children in the audience at the event who also have it and are called Aspies.

Rosie has also overcome adversity in being raised without a mother in her life. Rosie feels the lack of a mother's influence and feels that being raised by her mother's boyfriend, Phil, has been an unnecessary hardship in her life. In spite of what Rosie feels, Phil did raise Rosie the best he could and maybe someday she will be grateful for everything he has done. Phil, himself, had to overcome adversity in that he was injured in the same car accident that killed Rosie's mother. Phil had weeks of physical rehab all the while he was mourning the loss of his girlfriend. And it could not have been easy for a single unmarried man to raise a little girl, yet Phil persevered and did everything he could for Rosie. This is especially poignant when it is revealed at the end of the book that Phil is actually Rosie's biological father. It is not clear if Phil knew this all along, but he probably did not, which makes his sacrifices for Rosie even that much more important.

Sacrifice and Reward

Sacrifice and reward is an important theme in literature. Authors often set obstacles or trials in the way of characters to show how working hard for a cause usually brings a positive result. In *The Rosie Project*, Don sacrifices time and effort in order to administer the Father Project to help determine the identity of Rosie's biological father. Even though he had already initiated the Wife Project on his own behalf to find a marriage partner, Don interrupts those efforts in order to spend time on the Father Project. Don knows that Rosie has a difficult problem and that he, as a genetics professor, is fully capable of helping her get some resolution which would be a great thing. As the Father Project extends, Don and Rosie's relationship ebbs and flows, but Don perseveres because he knows that ultimately providing some closure for Rosie will bring her some much needed happiness. In the end, in spite of all the struggles, Don is able to identify



Rosie's father as Phil and both father and daughter can have some closure on an issue that has haunted their relationship.

Phil has also sacrificed in silence for the good of Rosie's life. When Rosie's mother died, Phil took Rosie to raise as his own child. It could not have been easy for Phil who was grieving the loss of his girlfriend, to take a little girl to raise. It seems as if Phil always did the best he could for Rosie throughout her life in spite of what she may think of him. It is also revealed in the story that immediately after the car crash that killed Rosie's mother, Phil was seriously injured but managed to pull Rose from the car and to safety. This is the ultimate in sacrifice when a person puts his or her life in jeopardy to rescue someone else. Phil pulled Rosie from the car first because he loved her and she was so little and had so much to live for yet. Phil knew that he could at least do this for Rosie so that she would live and he could give her the best life he knew how.

In another twist to the sacrifice and reward theme, Claudia's agreement to an open marriage to Gene seems to be the ultimate sacrifice. Claudia has sacrificed monogamous love in order to keep her husband happy in the hopes that one day he will want to be with her exclusively. Claudia's sacrifice ultimately pays off as Gene sees the error of his ways (after being threatened by Don) and reconciles with Claudia in the hopes that their marriage will be more authentic in the future.

Styles

Point of View

The story is told from the first person narrative point of view. This means that the author tells the story directly in his own words. As the narrator, Don uses the pronoun of "I" throughout because the story is being told just as he sees it or experienced it. With the first person narrative point of view, the reader has access to the thoughts and feelings of the narrator only. What is going on in the heads of any other people in the story is only speculative as the reader does not have the privilege of seeing them.

As Don goes from present day to flashbacks in the story, he still maintains the first person narrative point of view. The story is his and the reader will learn only what the author wants him or her to learn. The first person narrative point of view tells the narrator's story and the reader must take into account who the narrator is to understand the perspective. For example, a child will see a story from a different perspective from that of an adult and the reader should make allowances for that.

An example of the first person narrative point of view is when Don states, "Eventually, I set up my computer and we got started, eighteen minutes late. I would need to speak forty-three percent faster to finish on schedule at 8:00 p.m.-- a virtually impossible performance goal. We were going to finish late, any my schedule for the rest of the night would be thrown out." The author not only provides information from Don's perspective about what he did, but also projects into Don's thoughts about the impact the actions will have on his life. If this were written in another point of view, the speaker would be able to say that Don set up his computer and started eighteen minutes late but would have no insight on Don's thoughts about speaking faster or the impact on the rest of his night.

Language and Meaning

Because The Rosie Project is set in modern day, the language is current for the times. The author uses 21st century terminology and euphemisms in narration and dialogue to show authenticity. The author uses things like current movies and pop culture icons so that the modern day audience can relate to them.

Because the story is set in Australia, the author uses terms that are native to the country. For example, when Don is impatient that people do not spend more time understanding genetics states, "This sort of thing is incredibly annoying. People can tell you the supposed characteristics of a Gemini or a Taurus and will spend five days watching a cricket match but cannot find the interest or the time to learn the basics of what they, as humans, are made up of." Cricket is a game that is played in Australia but not in America, for example, so this is one way that the author keeps the language authentic to the story.



The author also keeps the language authentic to the characters. For example, Gene is a womanizer always on the prowl for his next conquest. The author writes, "I moved to push in but a tall, blond woman was ahead of me, and I did not want to risk body contact. She spoke with a Norwegian accent. 'Professor Barrow?' she said. 'With respect, I think you are oversimplifying the feminist position.' 'If we're going to talk philosophy, we should do it in a coffee shop,' Gene replied. 'I'll catch you at Barista's in five.'" Gene takes every opportunity to hit on women without ever skipping a beat in his dialogue. The flattery and seductive words seem to just flow from him and the author is consistent with this style for him throughout.

The author uses humor to a great extent in the book too, usually from Don's thoughts and dialogue. For example, when Rosie attempts to invite Don to spend the night, Don is not sure how to respond so in his mind he says, "Warning! Danger, Will Robinson. Unidentified alien approaching!" This is funny because it is a line from a television show called *Lost in Space* in which a robot tries to keep the character Will Robinson out of trouble during the family's space adventures. The phrase has been popularly adopted into the language and implies both humor and a popular culture aspect.

Structure

The structure of the story is straightforward with a few flashbacks for further understanding. The author tells the story in a clear, chronological pattern as the story extends. The story begins with Don's dilemma of finding a wife and proceeds in short increments of time as the author shares how Don attempts to find a resolution to his problem.

Flashbacks are used in the story to provide more detail, primarily about information that occurred in the lives of Don and Rosie, the main characters. For example, Don writes about his friend, Daphne. "Daphne had been named after the plant that was flowering at the time of her birth, the twenty-eighth of August. On each birthday, her husband would give her daphne flowers, and she considered this a highly romantic action. She complained that her approaching birthday would be the first occasion in fifty-six years on which this symbolic act would not be performed. The solution was obvious, and when I wheeled her to my apartment for dinner on her seventy-eighth birthday, I had purchased a quantity of flowers to give to her." This not only shows what Don did for Daphne in the past but it also provides some insight into his character that he could care for a lonely woman who missed the love of her husband.



Quotes

No coffee," I explained. "I never drink coffee after three forty-eight p.m. It interferes with sleep. Caffeine has a half-life of three to four hours, so it's irresponsible serving coffee at seven p.m. unless people are planning to stay awake until after midnight. Which doesn't allow adequate sleep if they have a conventional job.

-- Don (Chapter 1 paragraph 44)

Importance: Don lives a very regimented life with everything timed out and on schedule. Even Don's food choices are the same based on the day of the week. It is difficult for Don to adapt and being offered coffee at the lecture seems ridiculous for him because of the impact it would have on the rest of his evening which is planned down to the minute, as are all his evenings.

Fault! Asperger's isn't a fault. It's a variant. It's potentially a major advantage. Asperger's syndrome is associated with organization, focus, innovative thinking, and rational detachment.

-- Don (Chapter 2 paragraph 9)

Importance: When Don is giving a lecture on Asperger's syndrome, he is interrupted by the event organizer who makes a statement that having Asperger's is no one's fault. Don is offended by the remark that implies that people with Asperger's are flawed because he, himself, has Asperger's syndrome.

Aspies rule!

-- Children at Asperger's talk (Chapter 2 paragraph 20)

Importance: Don is pleased that some of the kids at the Asperger's syndrome talk call out afterwards because most of the time, people with Asperger's do not have the self confidence to act like that in social settings.

Listen. I have drunk two glasses of wine, I have not had sex for six weeks, and I would rather wait six more than try anyone else here. Now, can I buy you a drink?

-- Fabienne (Chapter 5 paragraph 13)

Importance: Fabienne is the antithesis of Don in that she offers him liquor and sex with no necessity of any qualifying characteristics or behaviors from Don.

Wow, Mr. Neat. How come there are no pictures on the walls?

-- Rosie (Chapter 7 paragraph 1)

Importance: On Rosie's first visit to Don's apartment, she immediately notices how sparsely the place is furnished with not even one painting on the walls. Don's reply, true to form, is that art is unnecessary here because the human brain will not process it after seeing it a couple times. If Don wants to see art, he goes to a museum where he says the art is superior anyway.



Gene sent me the world's most incompatible woman. A barmaid. Late, vegetarian, disorganized, irrational, unhealthy, smoker--smoker!--psychological problems, can't cook, mathematically incompetent, unnatural hair color. I presume he was making a joke.

-- Don (Chapter 8 paragraph 91)

Importance: Ben call Gene to tell him that Rosie is everything that he does not want in a wife and he is incredulous that Gene could have sent Rosie his way. But even though Rosie has way too many negative characteristics, at least according to Don, Don is still interested in seeing her again, showing that maybe science is not the best measure of a relationship.

You're wasting your time with the questionnaire. You'd be better off measuring the length of their earlobes.

-- Gene (Chapter 9 paragraph 10)

Importance: Gene is getting impatient with Don's method of trying to find a wife by using a questionnaire. Gene takes a much more sexual approach to life and thinks that Don's approach is too clinical and doomed to failure.

Call me.

-- Rosie (Chapter 10 paragraph 2)

Importance: Rosie gives her phone number to Don and asks him to call her. Don is beyond pleased because no woman has ever given him her phone number. Don begins to think that maybe he can interact socially with other people if Rosie has been able to behave toward him in this way.

Greetings, Dr. Collie. What can I get you to drink?" She looked at me strangely, and for a moment I thought I had made an error with the word association method I was using and that her name was perhaps Doberman or Poodle. But she did not correct me.

-- Don (Chapter 14 paragraph 24)

Importance: The author uses humor throughout the book and this is just one example of how he shows Don's thought processes and how Don is really a very funny guy even though he proceeds in all seriousness.

Warning! Danger, Will Robinson! Unidentified alien approaching. I could feel myself slipping into the emotional abyss. I managed to stay calm enough to respond.

-- Don (Chapter 17 paragraph 133)

Importance: "Warning! Danger, Will Robinson!" is a phrase that was spoken by a robot in a popular television program in the 1960s called Lost in Space. In the show, the robot when the show's main character was not aware of some impending danger. People use the phrase today as a humorous way to indicate that a mistake is about to be made.

Don's use of the phrase in his mind shows that he has a sense of humor and it exhibits in the context of a robot with which he probably relates.



You're like an old man--I always have my breakfast before I shower, don't sit in my chair, that's where I sit... Don't fuck with me, Don Tillman.

-- Rosie (Chapter 23 paragraph 13)

Importance: Rosie wants to take Don to breakfast but he resists because he normally eats before showering. Rosie is frustrated because Don cannot change his habits even though they are in New York and can get an amazing breakfast at a nearby restaurant. Rosie wants Don to ease on being so rigid about things that really don't matter and he eventually relents.

If you really love someone," Claudia continued, "you have to be prepared to accept them as they are. Maybe you hope that one day they get a wake-up call and make the changes for their own reasons.

-- Claudia (Chapter 30 paragraph 31)

Importance: For the first time, Claudia has intimated that something is wrong with her marriage to Gene. She and Don have become closer during all their meetings about Don's romantic issues and she feels safe in venting with Don that her own marriage is not working well.