

***After I Do - Resolution of Knowledge***

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## Introduction and Summary

In the second half of *After I Do*, the reader continues to follow Lauren's journey of self-discovery and what it means to be married. Lauren has discontinued reading Ryan's emails and has found satisfaction in other areas of her life, such as her family, her friendship with Mila and sexual relationship with David, and her hobby of running (Reid, 2014). She becomes more emotionally involved in her family, especially since Charlie is getting married to Natalie, a woman he had sex with on a plane from LA to Chicago (Reid, 2014). Reminders of Ryan slowly creep back into Lauren's life, and Lauren is confronted with whether she is going to get back with Ryan as the year comes to a close. Eventually, Lauren falls back into reading Ryan's emails, learns how he is struggling without her, and even writes her own emails back to him (Reid, 2014). One night, her grandmother becomes sick with cancer and requires Lauren and her family to rush to the hospital (Reid, 2014). Overcome with grief, Lauren realizes her love and need for Ryan and debates contacting him. Just as she is about to, he appears and they rekindle their relationship, acknowledging what they need to do differently in order for their marriage to succeed (Reid, 2014).

Because the story is told from Lauren's point of view, Reid (2014) provides an in-depth experience of how Lauren develops physically, cognitively, emotionally, and sexually. Lauren physically develops as the novel progresses through the toll that stress has on her body throughout the year-long separation. Lauren's cognitive development is evident in how she learns more practical decision-making and problem-solving skills that are based on logic and long-term consequences (Reid, 2014). This plays into Lauren's socioemotional development by allowing her to become more emotionally intelligent and realize her place within her social circle. Finally,

her sexual development happens through her own examination of desire and realization of her own needs during sex.

## **Development**

Lauren develops as an individual in multiple domains. While separated from Ryan, she focuses on her physical and mental health by observing what the stress of her relationship is doing to her and picking up a hobby of running. In the cognitive and socioemotional domains, Lauren expresses more control over her emotions and allows that to bleed into her problem-solving ability. Finally, Lauren learns that for her relationship with Ryan to be fulfilling, she must communicate her relational and sexual needs with him.

### ***Physical Development***

As an adult woman, Lauren does not describe much physical change in the second half of the book. She is in her thirties and has completed the developmental changes of adolescence without reaching the later stage of menopause. However, stress from her separation with Ryan affected her physically. Stress can cause harmful effects to the physical body. For example, long-term stress can cause debilitating symptoms to almost all parts of the body, but most prominent in endocrine, cardiovascular, and metabolic systems (Gallo et al., 2011). Lauren's stress from the temporary split is specific to whether Ryan is sleeping with other people or not (Reid, 2014). Lauren's anxiety got to a point that her friend, Mila had to snap her out of it by convincing her to stop reading Ryan's emails and fantasizing about Ryan's sex life (Reid, 2014). This depicts the mental turmoil that Lauren faces and how much stress was prevalent in her life during the separation.

### ***Cognitive Development***

Lauren's cognitive development is prevalent through the maturation of her decision-making and problem-solving abilities. At the start of the book, Lauren's decision-making skills are based on short-term gratification and her emotions within the moment. One example of this decision-making process is when she throws a vase at Ryan during their argument (Reid, 2014). Lauren threw the vase at Ryan because of her emotions - she felt as though Ryan did not care anymore and she had repressed her anger for a large portion of her marriage (Reid, 2014). Yet, when she separates from Ryan and faces other hardships, Lauren learns to consider the implications and consequences her behaviors/choices have by weighing the pros and cons and prioritizing her long-term values and goals (Reid, 2014). For instance, Lauren's decision to stop reading Ryan's emails was made after she reflected on how reading them made her feel and how it looked from the outside (Reid, 2014). Lauren became aware how the emails were affecting her everyday emotions and consciously decided to discontinue reading his emails to better improve her year separation from Ryan (even though she eventually went back on this decision at the end of the book) (Reid, 2014). In other words, Lauren's decision-making abilities became more goal-oriented and focused on long-term outcomes rather than impulsive, "in-the-moment" needs (Reid, 2014).

Lauren's decision-making skills bleeds into her problem-solving skills to allow her to develop a sex-positive perspective. A dimension of the sex-positive perspective is that positive sexuality encourages peacemaking and acts like self-discipline (Williams et al., 2015). Initially, Lauren struggles with impulsiveness and emotional reactivity. For instance, at the beginning of the book, Lauren is highly reactive to Ryan as they fight about the Dodgers game - she says things to hurt Ryan as a way of expressing her anger (Reid, 2014). Lauren has a sex-negative mindset because she is using her personal emotions to fight with Ryan and tries to exert some

form of control over their relationship (Reid, 2014; Williams et al., 2015). However, during her separation from Ryan, she develops better problem-solving skills by learning to be more rational and analytical, develops her perspective-taking skills, and learns to rely on other sources for social support (such as Rachel or Mila) (Reid, 2014). For example, Lauren gains a lot of insight about what it means to be in a relationship through her observations of other relationships around her (Reid, 2014). She learns that love manifests in different ways and that it requires a lot of attention, especially when partners do not have similar goals (as evident through how her mother handles Bill wanting to move in) (Reid, 2014). Lauren has adopted a sex-positive perspective because she uses self-control, learning, empathy, and self-control to develop a pragmatic solution (Williams et al., 2015). Overall, Lauren develops from a sex-negative perspective to a sex-positive perspective in her problem-solving by treating her emotional pain as a means to connect (Williams et al., 2015). Rather than use it as fuel to a fight and hurt Ryan, she uses it to make more comprehensive decisions (Reid, 2014).

### ***Socioemotional Development***

Lauren's socioemotional development is prevalent in how she views other relationships and how she becomes more self-aware of her emotional experiences. When Lauren and Ryan separate, Lauren learns to find meaning and happiness within her family (Reid, 2014). Specifically, Lauren learns that her family is supportive, open-minded, and loving, yet made up of different experiences that contribute to a variety of viewpoints (Reid, 2014). For instance, Lauren struggles to tell her mother and grandmother about her open-marriage and separation with Ryan (Reid, 2014). While her mother is instantly supportive, her grandmother challenges Lauren to learn the real meaning of marriage and where her priorities lie (Reid, 2014). This push

from her grandmother helps Lauren realize that she is autonomous but can also rely on her family for emotional support (Reid, 2014).

Her support from family is what allows her to develop into a more sex-positive perspective. At the beginning, Lauren obsesses over her dissatisfaction, frustration, and sadness with her marriage. Even after she and Ryan separate, she continues to fuel her anger and sadness by reading his emails and daydreaming about whether Ryan is sleeping with other people (Reid, 2014). However, as the story progresses, Lauren gradually learns to identify, express, and manage her emotions in a healthier, constructive manner. Specifically, she develops a deeper emotional awareness and learns to communicate her feelings more effectively. The sex-positive perspective highlights communication and negotiation as essential to positive interactions and outcomes (Williams et al., 2015). By having open communication, there is a freedom to language, concepts, and ideas that are different between partners, but a line to establish trust and safety that are necessary for personal and relational growth and well-being (Williams et al., 2015). For example, when Lauren and Ryan reunite, Lauren admits that she needs to tell Ryan what she wants rather than suppressing it, whether it be related to her sexual needs or what to have for dinner (Reid, 2014). She learned this through her relationship with David and Mila, who helped guide her in learning what she prioritizes in her relationship, how to better achieve her needs through communication, and how to better cope with destructive emotions (Reid, 2014). Overall, Lauren became a more emotionally mature and intelligent individual that learned to communicate and prioritize her needs.

### ***Sexual Development***

Lauren's sexual development increases throughout her separation with Ryan. While she may have only slept with David during their separation, she had the time to reflect on their sex life and what she needed from her partner. Lauren's time away from Ryan was critical to her sexual development because it gave her the opportunity to look inward to find what she desired in sex. Lauren describes how Ryan used to initiate sex—essentially by getting her to make the first move. Ryan would ask her what she wanted, which Lauren often interpreted as Ryan trying to get her to admit she wanted to have sex (even though she did not) (Reid, 2014). This describes Lauren's starting point on the spectrum of sexuality. Sex was something she pursued when prompted by Ryan, and as their relationship progressed, it was something that dwindled since she was the one responsible to initiate. And, when Lauren did have sex with Ryan, she found it unfulfilling and one sided - essentially, she wanted Ryan to try harder to make sex enjoyable for her too (Reid, 2014). Her separation with Ryan and eventual reading of his drafted emails leads her to realize how her pleasure in sex was nonexistent. And if they get back together that sex needs to be something they both receive orgasms from. This crucial realization is the summation of Lauren's sexual development by depicting her desires and ability to vocalize her needs.

DeLamater and Friedrich (2002) found that most couples will experience fundamental changes in their sexual experience at least once over the course of a relationship. Changes in relationships result from developing greater understanding of oneself and/or a partner, changes in communication patterns, or major stressors (DeLamater & Friedrich, 2002). While Lauren's change in sex did not come until the end of the book, her marriage followed the typical trajectory of marriage - specifically one where their marital and sexual satisfaction decreased. However, it is worth mentioning that Lauren's understanding of the sexuality circles increased. Lauren developed her understanding of what intimacy means and how it should play out (especially

when it came to being vulnerable and disclosing her sexual needs) (Turner, 2020). Moreover, she developed in the sexualization and sensuality circle by rekindling the spark with Ryan, engaging in an active sex life, and finding methods to keep both her and Ryan satisfied sexually (Turner, 2020). Finally, she developed in her sexual identity by engaging in an open relationship with Ryan. Through her open relationship and separation, she was able to learn how to establish a line of communication and be honest about her needs with Ryan through her sexual relationship with David, thus contributing to her ideas of an egalitarian marriage (Turner, 2020)

## **Conclusion**

Lauren's character development relates to sexuality not only by her open marriage with Ryan, but also by exploring other intimate relationships that look like hers. Lauren observes a variety of relationships that manifest love, intimacy, and sexuality differently - from Charlie's shotgun wedding to Mila's lesbian wife - and how her situation with Ryan is not abnormal (Buis, 2023; Davis, 2023). Reid's (2014) message of the story was just that: love is expressed in a variety of ways, and it is not always set out to be easy. Sometimes partners fight and must find a way to rekindle their relationship, and partners should utilize their resources to help establish a connection. In other words, Reid (2014) emphasizes that love is not always pretty, and for a couple to overcome their hardships, they must communicate with each other rather than discarding their own feelings. Overall, Reid (2014) could have shown more of the hardships it takes for a couple to rekindle their relationship - just allowing Lauren and Ryan to magically realize how much they need each other did not seem realistic given the reason for their separation (Reid, 2014).

Given the final message, we believe that Lauren would benefit from learning the sexuality circles because the model encompasses areas where she had the most development. The



sexuality circle framework is a strengths-based approach to sexuality and would allow Lauren to view herself, Ryan, and her relationship in a more positive light coupled with her sex-positive perspective (Turner, 2020). Within the sexual identity, sexualization, sensuality, and intimacy circles, we would teach Lauren the importance of communication in intimate relationships and sexual needs (Turner, 2020). Furthermore, we may even teach Lauren that having an open marriage is still a possibility if her relationship does not benefit from monogamy. In consensual non-monogamy, we would teach Lauren the benefits of an open marriage and how it could contribute to a better marriage with Ryan as her primary partner (Wood et al., 2021).

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