

Life without ed: analysis essay



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Carly Kursman Social Psychology Rob Wahl October 30, 2007 “ From the outside looking in, You can’t understand it. From the inside looking out, You can’t explain it.

” (Schaefer, 2004: xxviii) “ Life without Ed: How one woman Declared Independence from Her Eating Disorder and How you can too,” shows the courage of a young woman who finally leaves behind her biggest crutch; E. D. , her eating disorder. For more than 20 years, Jenni Schaefer was controlled and abused by a man name E. D.

(her eating disorder). He abused her both physically, encouraging her to become emaciated and helping her to develop osteopenia. He also abused her mentally, calling her names, denying her feelings and leaving her completely depressed. After more than two decades under his control, Jenni decided she wanted her freedom back and chose to let go of E. D.

Though, throughout her recovery she stumbled and fell, relapsed several times and even convinced herself she would never recover, she finally regained her own life back today; her life without E. D. This book is extremely well written and speaks to its readers. Jenni wrote this book to persuade her readers to let go of E.

D. before getting trapped under his spell. She also wrote it to help those who have struggled for many years, hoping to encourage them to get help because recovery is possible. People develop eating disorders for many reasons. Jenni was told as a four-year-old dancer that she needed to be thin; food controlled her life ever since (Schaefer, 2004: xxii).

Nearly five to ten million women in the United States suffer from some type of eating disorder (Schaefer, 2004: xxvi). Whether it is anorexia, bulimia, restriction, over-eating or over-exercise, a man named E. D. controls every aspect of their lives. Eating disorders are serious addictions that can and do kill both men and women. In order to begin to recover from an eating disorder, one must admit to their problem and then commit to an intensive battle of recovery.

When struggling with an eating disorder it is truly impossible to actually live. Once free from E. D.'s control, life becomes exciting again and each day becomes a new adventure.

This paper will connect the processes of an eating disorder, including the recovery process, to social psychological concepts, theories and ideas to understand the extreme difficulties of ultimately breaking free from E. D. Throughout Jenni's life with and without E. D. she has been her own investigator, researching to find a way of life that would bring her recovery. Jenni constructed her own field research, "research done in natural, real-life settings outside of the laboratory (Myers, 1993: 40)," as she battled through her eating disorder.

Her research, done at home, at work and in therapy, allowed her to discover how she would recover. With hard work, Jenni's field research paid off because she no longer lives with E. D., however the process was not simple.

She first had to escape from E. D.'s control. This was difficult because she held a belief perseverance supporting E. D. despite overwhelming concern from others.

Belief perseverance is, “ persistence of one’s initial conceptions, as when the basis for one’s belief is discredited but an explanation of why the belief might be true survives (Myers, 1993: 44). ” This applies to Jenni and E. D. because at the beginning of their relationship she believed in everything he told her. Even when her therapist and doctors told her that he was only hurting her, she continued supporting his wishes. E.

D. lways remained by her side telling her she could trust him and to follow his path. E. D. was the only irrational person that supported her desires to get even thinner.

When trying to understand how Jenni can change her behaviors in order to recover, social psychologists should use the cognitive perspective of psychology. This approach to social psychology proposes that our behavior can best be understood by focusing on how we mentally structure and process information coming from the environment. Basically, this concept asks what the person was thinking before acting in a specific way. In order for Jenni to change her E.

D. ehavior, it is necessary to know the feelings that caused her to act in the way she did. Once she discovers what emotions drove her to rely on E. D. , recovery becomes more attainable. Focusing only on the behavior, under the behavioral perspective of psychology, would not provide Jenni with information about why she feels like she needs to hurt herself and thus would not help in her recovery.

Honesty is a key factor in the demise of E. D. , however, wanting to let go of him and then doing that, is not as simple as it seems. One may truly want to,
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but the control can be so overwhelming that only practice and time will bring freedom.

Cognitive dissonance, “ tension that arises when one is simultaneously aware of two inconsistent cognitions. For example, dissonance may occur when we realize that we have, with little justification, acted contrary to our attitudes or made a decision favoring one alternative despite reasons for favoring another (Myers, 1993: 134). ” In reality, this is a complicated breakdown of Jenni and E. D. ’s relationship. E.

D. is telling Jenni to starve herself or purge while Jenni is fighting back and resisting. “ Ed: You should not eat dinner. Jenni: You are wrong.

I should eat dinner, but I just can’t (Schaefer, 2004: 9). Jenni had many dialogues in her head fighting E. D. while he was attacking, and she both won and lost. Cognitive dissonance occurs with Jenni when she loses the battle against E. D.

She forgets about the support she has from therapy and her recovery goals and acts in accordance to E. D. In this situation she has acted contrary to her beliefs about recovery and health. She instead chose E. D.

, while knowing E. D. is always the wrong choice. Letting go of an eating disorder is a very hard task because it is something a person only knows.

Jenni called letting go of E. D. filing for divorce (Schaefer, 2004: xix), and was able to overcome his control with the help of her psychotherapist Thom Rutledge. At this point in her life, she needed attitude consistency. This is when people tend to organize their attitudes so they are not in conflict.

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When people find that their attitudes are inconsistent or imbalanced with others they care about and respect they feel stress and discomfort.

Jenni began feeling that stress and discomfort after listening to E. D. 's voice for way too long. She was not taking the advice and knowledge of a trustworthy and professional therapist. So, Jenni decided she needed to share the same attitudes as Thom, and that meant saying goodbye to her husband, E.

D. Recovery consists of many steps and one main step is to attend individual and group therapy sessions weekly. Jenni's therapy group was her social group, referring to two or more people who identify and interact with one another under three different characteristics: 1. At least two or more people belong to the group, 2. whose members influence one another and 3. The members view themselves as an " us.

" Jenni read her Declaration of Independence from E. D. o her therapy group because these were ladies who were struggling with the same battle and trying to support each other to finally overcome it (Schaefer, 2004: 4-5). The members in Jenni's therapy group were coactors, " a group of people working simultaneously and individually on a noncompetitive task (Myers, 1993: 305). " Each group member was chasing the same goal, recovery, and helping each member to get there as fast as possible. E.

D. controlled Jenni for almost her entire life. Leaving him behind meant starting a new life where her thoughts and actions would be very different. Jenni could no longer rely and trust what E. D.

was telling her. She was forced to no longer accept his confirmation bias, “the tendency to search for information that confirms one preconceptions” (Myers, 1993: 51). In order to recover, Jenni could not turn to E. D. when she wanted to starve herself. Now, she was forced to accept a new confirmation bias confirming the steps to recovery which came from her therapist and her therapy group members.

During Jenni’s recovery process, her doctor informed her that she developed osteopenia. “After realizing what poor condition my bones were in and what might lie ahead for me, I immediately got mad at myself. Why didn’t you take care of yourself? Strong bones run in your family, but you ruined yours. Why did you starve and deprive yourself for all of those years? (Schaefer, 2004: 162)” This instance describes Jenni using counterfactual thinking, “imagining alternative scenarios and outcomes that might have happened, but didn’t (Myers, 1993: 57).

” This demonstrates counterfactual thinking because Jenni got angry with herself and wished for that second that she never had formed an eating disorder. With recovery finally under Jenni’s belt, life is much more enjoyable for her. Jenni can finally see herself under the self-serving bias, “the tendency to perceive oneself favorably (Myers, 1993: 88),” because she has gained freedom and her life back. “I wake up every morning happy to be alive. I am happy to be free and not ruled by Ed. I am thrilled that I no longer have to squeeze myself into a tiny glass box every day—smiling as the air in the box is used up (Schaefer, 2004: 173).

” Jenni also has feelings of self-efficacy, “ a sense that one is competent and effective. Distinguished from self-esteem, a sense of one’s self-worth (Myers, 1993: 103), now that E. D. is no longer in her life. While living with E.

D. , Jenni was depressed, lonely and unmotivated. Now that he is no longer a burden, she is less anxious and depressed, writing music and going out with friends. Both of these qualities play a large role in self-efficacy (Myers, 1993: 104). This research paper illustrates how the process of one woman’s eating disorder can be understood through social psychological theories, concepts and ideas. It tracks the recovery process of, Jenni Schaefer, who openheartedly shared her painful story with the world to help others also recover.

Eating disorders are extremely difficult to understand especially when family members and friends and battling one. This paper shows how people get sucked in and swallowed by E. D, and then shows her determination will bring recovery. This paper served as a unique way to understand an eating disorder through the information discussed in class throughout the semester. I learned many things while reading this amazing book. From the moment I picked up the yellow cover there was no putting it down until I was finished.

I know of many people suffering from eating disorders as this subject is one that is truly close to my heart. I learned that fighting off demons, even if they are engrained in your brain for such a large amount of time, can happen. You must be committed to do the work and truly want a better life. I also learned how to connect eating disorders with social psychology. It was interesting

how each section of Jenni's recovery fit in to some idea or concept from the class.

I would recommend this book to anyone who has an eating disorder, who knows someone with an eating disorder or is interesting in learning about eating disorders. She doesn't explain thoroughly her rock bottom or other really bad times that happened during the battle with E. D. I like that tactic because some people might want to take that information and use it negatively especially if they are just starting to deal with an eating disorder. I am so grateful that I was able to read this book and relate it to this class in such a positive way.

Bibliography 1. Schaefer, Jenni and, Thom Rutledge. Life Without Ed. New York, New York: Mcgraw-Hill Professional, 2004. 2.

Myers, David. Social Psychology. 4th edition. Holland, Michigan: Mcgraw-Hill, Inc. , 1993.