



"Necessary, urgent, and so beautiful."

—JESMYN WARD

essays

SOMETIMES
I TRIP
ON
HOW
HAPPY
WE COULD BE

NICHOLE PERKINS

BOOK CLUB KIT

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In “Fast,” how does Nichole see and feel that intimacy is a double-edged sword often turned against women? How has sex and desire shaped your life in terms of these dueling capacities?
2. In “A Woman Who Shouts,” how does Nichole negotiate her relationship with religion alongside the pressures of societal expectations and the judgment of the congregations she’s a part of? What does this say about how we each can navigate the world when faced with external pressures?
3. It took growing up for Nichole to recognize the abusive qualities of Kermit and Miss Piggy’s relationship. Reflecting on the pop culture you consumed as a child, what subliminal or explicit messaging do you think was passed on to you at an early age?
4. Nichole reflects on a number of past romantic relationships in the essay “White Boys.” Several of them taught her valuable lessons about what she is willing to put up with (or not), particularly as she experienced several racist incidents. How do these experiences speak to the difficulties and complexities of dating as a Black woman? What does that reveal about the prevalence of racism, and the failure of white allyship, in America more broadly?
5. Janet Jackson’s career and her public perception left lasting impressions on both Nichole and her mother, albeit very different ones. How is it possible that we each draw such disparate meanings? About her body, Nichole writes that “everyone saw what they wanted to see.” Could that be true of these pop culture artifacts as well?
6. In “Prince’s Girl,” Nichole writes that the titular artist was a “stranger [she] knew [she’d] never meet, but he knew [her].” What is so meaningful about feeling recognized or represented in the media we consume? How does this essay and the larger collection speak to the effects of a dearth of positive Black representation in pop culture?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

7. Both with Hector and in reference to the Okayplayer message boards, Nichole explores the value of boundaries. Especially now, as the internet has become integral to every facet of our lives, why is it important to construct boundaries and determine limits? Likewise, how are they important in our real-life relationships?

8. Nichole says she finds power in a range of roles, from dominant to submissive, mistress to baby girl. What do you think is empowering about exploring such dynamics within sexuality generally and for women specifically? What restrictions are placed on the sexuality of Black women in particular that might complicate these power dynamics?

9. The popularity of true and fictionalized crime shows, podcasts, and books continues to grow, as Nichole illustrates on a micro level with the show *Bones*. What do you think attracted her to that show during a particularly dark period of her life? What do you think this says about our collective interest in crime?

10. In a number of her essays, Nichole touches on the importance of being seen in pop culture. Feeling seen by people, like her college classmates or Aunt C, seems to have made an equally significant impact on Nichole. Do you have anyone you think shaped the course of your life or sense of self in this way?

11. Nichole focuses on a number of pop culture touchstones throughout this collection, from *Cheers* to Prince, analyzing how they shaped her understanding of the world. What are a few cultural touchstones that likewise affected how you interact with our society and culture more broadly?

12. The title of the book is a line from “If I Was Your Girlfriend,” Nichole’s favorite Prince song, referenced in the chapter “Prince’s Girl.” Although she does not explicitly quote this line in her memoir, how do you think it represents the theme of the book and Nichole’s life overall?

MORE RESOURCES FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB



"We all deserve care and tenderness in the way that we treat ourselves. Hopefully, that means if someone sees me treating myself tenderly, they'll also treat me tenderly."

Read a q&a with
Nichole Perkins

Listen to a playlist of songs that inspired or were featured in the book!



Including:

- "If I Was Your Girlfriend" by Prince
- "The Rainbow Connection" by The Muppets
- "Tennessee Slim is the Bomb" by Joi
- "Lady Marmalade" by LaBelle
- "Mary, Don't You Weep" by Aretha Franklin
- "I Know I've Been Changed" by LaShun Pace
- "Jesus Walks" by Kanye West
- "Congratulations" by Vesta Williams
- "As We Lay" by Shirley Murdock
- "Jolene" by Dolly Parton
- "Woman to Woman" by Shirley Brown