

Discussion Questions

***Everyone in This Room Will Someday Be Dead* by Emily Austin**

1. Gilda takes a job at a Catholic church despite being a lesbian atheist, which seems distinctly antithetical, and part of the fun is watching this situation unfold. Do you think Gilda's attempts to hide who she is at work have a detrimental effect on her? Or is Gilda used to hiding things about herself?
2. Gilda's parents both seem to be unable to face difficult realities. How do you think her parent's—and, in particular, her dad's—reactions to her behavior as a child affected her as she grew up? How do you think they affect both Gilda and Eli now that they're adults?
3. Do you think it surprises Gilda when she hears Jeff crying after the death of a teenager from the congregation? How does witnessing someone else's grief affect Gilda, who is constantly anxious about people's deaths?
4. In what ways does working in the church subvert Gilda's (and perhaps our own) expectations of what the experience will be like for her?
5. What do Gilda's experiences with the health care system reveal to us about how acute anxiety is managed (or mismanaged) by health care professionals? How could her visits have been handled differently?
6. Gilda believes that Eleanor is trying to steal her identity when they first start messaging on a dating app. Does this allow Gilda to act differently—and more candidly—with Eleanor than with her previous matches? Why do you think this is the case?
7. Gilda's anxieties throughout the novel can often be debilitating. They leave her unable to do dishes or shower, they cause her to obsess over things she can't control (like the missing cat), and they often cause her to break into tears or have panic attacks at inconvenient times. What is it like for the reader to experience life through Gilda's eyes? How did that affect you? Was it eye-opening or deeply familiar for you? Do you share her fears and, if so, to what extent?
8. As we see, Gilda often says yes to offers—the job at the church, the date with Giuseppe, etc.—when they are presented to her. Why do you think she does this?

9. How does Gilda's worldview contrast with Giuseppe's opinion that you can do anything you'd like in life as long as you believe that you can?
10. Gilda often hides what she's thinking, like just how much she's preoccupied with death, etc. How do these small omissions snowball into bigger ones? At what point does personal information about your own anxieties become necessary to share so that you can live as authentically as possible?
11. Gilda's focus on death and the chaotic realities of existence can make societal conventions (such as what's considered a sin) seem small in comparison. How does this contrast of existential dread shine a light on the rules and conventions that so many of us abide by? In your opinion, does it make them seem more trivial and nonsensical? Or does the acknowledgement of death help give meaning to existence?
12. In some ways, Gilda is very preoccupied with existence and the meaninglessness of our temporary lives, and in other ways, she cares deeply the details that shape the lives of humans and animals. How do these seemingly opposite notions seem to coexist or push against each other in her mind?
13. Barney tells Gilda that the characteristics of psychopaths are having been bullied as a child, committing petty crimes, and being chronically unemployed, which we know are all criteria that fit Gilda. What do you think it means to her to hear that she fits the profile? Do you think we paint with too broad a brush when we talk about people with mental illnesses?
14. Why do you think Gilda is fixated on hands—her own and other people's? Why does she think so much about how they are the same hands throughout people's whole lives?

Source: Simon & Schuster Reading Group Guide