

READING GROUP QUESTIONS



Which character did you like the most?

Which character did you find it hardest to sympathise with?

How did your feelings about the various characters change throughout the course of the novel?

Which events or revelations in the novel surprised you most?

What has Yasmin learned about herself by the end of the novel that she didn't know in the beginning?

How did you respond to the novel's portrayal of sex?

Why do you think Yasmin experiences more sexual satisfaction and excitement with Pepperdine than with Joe?

Was there anything in the novel that you found controversial?

How optimistic or pessimistic is the novel about marriage?

What general impressions of UK society does the novel offer?

What general impressions does it offer of the life of a junior doctor?

How did you respond to the novel's portrayal of racism?

How do you interpret Harriet's wish for Joe and Yasmin to have a religious wedding, even though she herself is an atheist?

What do you make of Arif's experience with the police while at university? To what extent do you agree with Yasmin's opinion that he has remembered it wrongly, that he 'had it all so muddled'?

Yasmin says to Pepperdine: 'I think the truth is most men are unfaithful. Maybe most women too. That's just how people are, I think. When it comes down to it.' Do you agree?

How does the writing style differ when the novel is inhabiting different points of view, ie those of Yasmin, Sandor and Harriet? Are any of these points of view more successful or convincing for you than others?

Why do you think the author chose these three characters' perspectives to tell the story from, rather than any of the other characters?

What role do you think Sandor's perspective plays in the novel? What do you think of Sandor's response to Joe's behaviour? How would you have felt differently about Joe's behaviour if it had been presented differently in the novel?

Sandor says to Joe that it is important to look at his past because 'What we do not know controls us.' To what extent do you agree with this idea? How does it relate to other threads of the novel?

One theme of the novel is the effect of parents' behaviour on their children. How much responsibility do you think Harriet should bear for Joe's issues with sex addiction?

Arif accuses Yasmin of having a sort of Stockholm Syndrome in relation to their father. What do you make of this characterisation of her relationship with him?



Rania says: 'You say women who adopt Islamic dress aren't truly free because we've been conditioned. But do you say the same about the women on Love Island? They choose to show their bodies. Do you raise concerns about whether they've been conditioned by the culture? Do you criticise them for imagining they are free?' Do you think women like those who appear on Love Island in little clothing are more or less free than women who wear Islamic dress that covers their hair (or face)?

What image of contemporary feminism does the novel offer?

'One thing Sandor had learned this past year was that Brits were more entrenched in the hierarchy of pain than Americans.' What does the phrase 'hierarchy of pain' mean to you? Do you think such a thing exists?

Harriet says: 'Liberal guilt facilitates the acceptance of the status quo because the guilt substitutes for action. It becomes the action taken, and therefore blocks any need to change anything at all. Useless. Worthless. Dangerous, in its own supine way.' Do you agree?

How does Monica Ali examine intersectionality in the novel?

At the gala dinner, Harriet tells the young novelist Nathan to write something 'closer to home'. What do you think of this advice? Do you think writers should stick to writing what is close to them?

Do you think the novel has any sort of message, or key ideas it tries to express?

