

The New Press Reading Group Guide

What We Talk About When We Talk About Rape

by Sohaila Abdulali

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Sohaila
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QUESTIONS

1. Abdulali writes of her double-edged fear that “in my hopes of contributing to the conversation in a level-headed manner, I will appear to be saying that rape is no big deal” and that “in saying it does not have to be the end of hope and light, I will appear flippant and not honor rape victims’ terrible suffering and trauma.” Does she succeed in striking the right balance? (p. 95)
2. While researching her book Abdulali spoke to survivors all over the world. How do their stories enrich—or detract from—the book?
3. Does Abdulali offer a clear path forward for dealing with rape? If so, what is it?
4. After reading this book, do you feel differently about rape in comparison to other crimes?
5. What purpose do you think the five “Brief Pause” chapters are intended to serve? Are they effective?
6. The book discusses what the BDSM (bondage, discipline, dominance, submission, sadism, masochism) community might have to offer to the discussion of consent. Does this seem reasonable? (p. 46)
7. Do you think that a result of the #MeToo movement will be that there are fewer sexual assaults in the future?
8. Abdulali implies that rape is a choice, not something that men do when they lose control. Do you agree?

9. The book describes the tension between revenge and mercy. Where do you find yourself on this spectrum?
10. At one point in the book, the author writes, “I can imagine murdering, but not raping.” Why does she say this? Do you agree with her? (p. 196)
11. Why is shame such a common response among victims of rape?
12. Why did the author’s father react so differently to his daughter’s rape than other families in India did in similar circumstances?
13. Who should read this book? Is it targeted to victims, women, young people, old people, men, educators or other professionals? Do you think it is a book that teenagers would benefit from reading?
14. How would you categorize this book? Which shelf does it belong on in the library?
15. In the book’s final chapter, the author writes, “I don’t care if I’m a mad dreamer, but I think a world without rape is possible.” Do you agree? Or is she indeed a mad dreamer? (p. 207)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sohaila Abdulali was born in Mumbai. She has a BA from Brandeis University in economics and sociology and an MA from Stanford University in communication. She is the author of two novels as well as children’s books and short stories. She lives in New York with her family.