



Book Club Questions
Women of a Promiscuous Nature by Donna Everhart

1. Women could be detained on the word of neighbors, husbands, or strangers-and sometimes simply for being young, unmarried, poor, or considered "suspicious." How did such a vague definition of promiscuity give others power over women's lives? Who ultimately got to decide what behavior was acceptable?
2. The American Plan operated for decades, yet many readers, like the novel's characters, may never have heard of it. Why do you think this history stayed buried for so long, and how did it change your understanding of women's rights in the early 20th century?
3. The program was justified as protecting public health and preserving decency. Did the novel make you think differently about where the line should be between government responsibility for public health and an individual's right to bodily autonomy?
4. Ruth, Stella, and Dorothy Baker each tell part of the story. How did hearing from the superintendent and the women who were detained change your feelings? Did Dorothy's true belief in her mission to "reform" make her more disturbing than a simple villain would have been?
5. Ruth is defiant from day one. How does her unwavering sense of self and refusal to break contrast with the other women who slowly succumb to conformity?
6. How does Stella's reaction to being in an institution complicate the novel's themes of victimization and agency?
7. Do you see Stella's desire to please Baker as a way to survive or a true effort to find stability?
8. Was Stella better off, at least initially, at the Colony?
9. How does the novel portray Dorothy Baker-does it make her seem more sympathetic or frightening? What does it suggest about people who harm others while believing they're helping?



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10. The women at the Colony come from very different backgrounds and circumstances. How do their friendships, tensions, and alliances help them survive? Where do you see the limits of solidarity among women living within a system designed to control them?

11. Several women are judged not for what they have done, but for what others believe about them. What do you think the novel is saying about how easily reputation can become its own kind of punishment?

12. How do you see the themes of bodily autonomy and policing of women's behavior reflected in today's laws and social norms?

13. Women of a Promiscuous Nature uses the language once used to categorize and condemn women. What did the title mean to you before reading the novel, and how did its meaning change by the end?

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