



READING GROUP GUIDE

This reading group guide for *The Players Club* includes an introduction, discussion questions and a Q&A with author Rachel Mills. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

INTRODUCTION


Beth Greenwood has spent her life playing it safe. She's been a graphic designer at the same company for a decade, she dutifully meets men from the apps for dinner and sometimes casual sex, she thinks about decorating her sterile, small apartment. Her comfort and joy are her Sunday catchups with her sister Elspeth, whose perfect life, very different from Beth's, has recently started to unravel.

One day, Beth meets a woman who invites her to join a secret club. It's not knitting or books; it's living out an experience you've always wanted to have. Cirque du Soleil acrobat, gonzo graffiti artist, performer in the BDSM underground scene: these women will get you everything you need in order to—temporarily—be the person you might have been, had your life taken one or two different turns.

At first Beth is dazzled by her new friendships and the opportunity they offer her to test the boundaries of her identity, to escape from her quiet, ordinary life. But even the best of clubs can offer only so much distraction, and when the stakes of Beth's real life become uncomfortably high, she must ask herself, really and truly, who she's going to choose to be, and who is going to nurture her when she needs it most.



TOPICS & QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1) Discuss Beth's initial motivation for getting involved with the club. Do you think her choices were justified given her circumstances at the time?
 - 2) When "life-playing" is introduced, it faces misinformation and online abuse, but over time it is embraced and ultimately commoditized. Does this pattern reflect real life? Can a joyous practice spread widely without being co-opted or exploited by capitalism?
 - 3) Consider the strict rules that govern the club. How do these rules manipulate the members, and what do they reveal about the people who created them?
 - 4) Discuss the relationships between the core characters. How did the secretive nature of their environment impact their ability to trust one another?
 - 5) How do the characters' chosen life-plays reflect their inner desires, struggles, or identities? For example, does Beth's role as a graffiti artist reveal unfulfilled artistic ambitions? Does her role as a fetish performer suggest a repressed or forbidden exploration of sexuality?
 - 6) Does Leila's portrayal of a risky circus performer symbolize a willingness to gamble with her life? What might Leila's role as an old woman reveal about her journey of self-discovery or learning?
 - 7) The book explores both the challenges and beauty of motherhood—children longed for, children painfully given up, and a mother lost too soon—alongside profound acts of nurturing. What does the book reveal about the ways we care for and support one another?
 - 8) Sisterhood is often portrayed as a powerful and complex relationship in fiction—why do you think writers are drawn to it? How do Beth and Elsbeth embody or challenge these literary themes of sisterhood?
 - 9) What message do you think the author is trying to convey about ambition and the pursuit of status in modern society?
 - 10) What message do you think the author is trying to convey about ambition and the pursuit of status in modern society?
 - 11) How did your perception of the club change from the beginning of the book to the end? What specific events shifted your view?
 - 12) If you could play a different life, who would it be? Do you think this is an extension of your real self? A challenge to limiting beliefs you've been given? Pure escapism?
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ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB

This activity will bring the concept of Life-Play to reality and spark a rich discussion about the themes in the book. Have fun transforming!

How to Life-Play: A Quick Guide for Your Book Club

1. Understand Life-Play: Life-Play is about stepping into the shoes of a completely different personality for one day. It's not about acting or mimicry—it's about truly behaving as that person.

2. Choose Your Life: Or rather, let the Life choose you! A Life-Lust (the overwhelming desire to play a specific Life) will guide you. Avoid borrowing real or fictional identities or anything that involves marginalization or harm.

3. Prepare Your Life: Flesh out your Life's backstory (Legend), setting, and key characteristics. Think about their motivations, quirks, and how they interact with the world. Use empathy to fully embody this new persona.

4. Follow the Rules:

- Play for one day only.
- Leave no trace—dismantle everything after.
- Avoid harm, cultural appropriation, or criminal goals.
- Keep it ethical and consensual.

5. Show Up as Your Life: For the book club, arrive as your chosen Life-Play character. Be ready to share who they are, why you chose them, and how it felt to embody them. Reflect on what you learned about empathy, identity, or creativity through the experience.

COCKTAIL & MOCKTAIL RECIPES

Get into the spirit of *The Players Club* with these delicious drink recipes, perfect for setting the mood for your next book club meeting. Whether you're in the mood for a cocktail or a mocktail, we've got you covered!


THE LIFE-PLAYING GIN 707

A bold and zesty cocktail to awaken your inner life-player.

Ingredients:

- 60ml (2oz) your favorite gin
- 15ml (½oz) Cointreau (or other orange liqueur)
- 30ml (1oz) freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 15ml (½oz) simple sugar syrup (store-bought or homemade: dissolve equal parts sugar and boiling water, then cool)
- Pinch of dried chili flakes
- Ice: Cubed
- Garnish: Orange zest

Equipment:

- Cocktail shaker
 - Strainer
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Method:

1. Fill a cocktail shaker with ice.
2. Add all the ingredients.
3. Shake vigorously to combine and chill.
4. Strain into a chilled cocktail or coupe glass.
5. Garnish with a twist of orange.
6. Sip and let a Life-Lust overtake you!

THE PLAYERS CLUB FIZZ

A refreshing and elegant non-alcoholic option to keep you in the game.

Ingredients:

- 30ml (1oz) lime cordial
- 30ml (1oz) elderflower cordial
- 3 drops orange blossom water
- 250ml ice-cold soda water
- Ice

Method:

1. Pour all the ingredients into a jug and stir gently.
2. Serve in a champagne flute or coupe glass.
3. Enjoy while you prepare for play!

Recipes provided by Saturday Kitchen presenter, drinks expert, and *The Players Club* mega-fan, Olly Smith. For more brilliant life-playing cocktail and mocktail ideas, check out his book: *World Cocktail Atlas: Travel the World of Drinks Without Leaving Home*.

WHAT TO WATCH AFTER YOU'VE READ *THE PLAYERS CLUB*

Looking for your next read or watch? Here are some of my favorite recommendations that explore themes, genres, and vibes similar to *The Players Club*.


Books About Living in Different Stories or Lives

These novels beautifully explore how we navigate multiple lives, identities, or realities:

- *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig
- *The Book of Form and Emptiness* by Ruth Ozeki
- *Life After Life* by Kate Atkinson

Books Where Sad People Do Unusual Things

This genre is a personal favorite—quirky, heartfelt, and often hilarious:

- *The Wedding People* by Alison Espach
 - *Big Swiss* by Jen Beagin
 - *Where'd You Go, Bernadette* by Maria Semple
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Heist Films

I can't resist a good heist film, especially the "getting the gang together" montage. (If I were in one, I'd definitely be the "greaseman"!)

Here are some classics and modern gems:

Classics

- *The Italian Job*
- *A Fish Called Wanda*
- *The Lavender Hill Mob*

Modern Favorites

- *Ocean's Eleven*
- *Logan Lucky*

Stories About Sisters

Sisters are the best! Here are some fantastic stories that celebrate the unique dynamics, personalities, and bonds of sisterhood:

- *Bad Sisters* (TV Show) – A brilliant show that explores the wildly different personalities of sisters and how they come together (or clash) in unexpected ways.
- *Selfish Girls* by Abi Bergstrom – A captivating book featuring some unforgettable sisters.
- *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott – The ultimate classic about sisterhood, love, and growing up.

A CONVERSATION WITH RACHEL MILLS

The Players Club poses a fascinating question: if you could be anyone else for a day, who would you be and why? How did this idea come to you?


As kids, we dream about who we want to be without worrying about practicalities—truck driver, astronaut, pop star. But as we grow up, it can feel like the paths we've chosen have closed behind us. Our personalities solidify: you're the responsible one, the kind one, the career-driven person, or the stay-at-home parent. These roles can feel set in stone, and making a big change becomes daunting. But what if it wasn't?


I started asking my friends who they'd choose to be for a day, and their answers were wonderfully revealing. My own picks? A trapeze artist, a TV chef, or one of those effortlessly chic French women who never smiles and looks elegant in men's tailoring. Two of these reflect high-energy versions of things I already enjoy, while the third is completely opposite to who I am.

One friend said she'd love to oversee the gardens of a sleepy stately home—peace, quiet, fresh air—everything she feels is missing from her hectic home and office life. Another wanted to be an air traffic controller. "I'd be so great at it," she said, and honestly, I think she's right—though it's a little terrifying!

So it began with this idea of escaping the drudgery of daily life.

It began with the idea of escape. But as I thought more about it, I realized that role-playing opportunities are everywhere in real life—from Dungeons and Dragons to historical reenactments, from immersive theater to... ahem... "playing doctors and nurses" with your partner. Even when we're not actively pretending to be someone else, consider the small ways we present a version of ourselves that isn't entirely authentic: feigning confidence at





work, for instance, or patiently listening to a friend cry over a terrible boyfriend for the fifteenth time without telling her she'd be better off without him. Posting a stunning photo on Instagram while, in reality, you're a complete mess.

And then I started thinking about how we're constantly creating our own identities—every single day—shaped by both who we believe we are and who we aspire to be.

There's a difference between the two, right?

There's a distinction between the two, but there's also a third layer: the messages we internalize about who we should be. Women are constantly told who we are—by the media, the internet, and every predictable court decision that chips away at our rights and voices.

In the novel, Beth feels like a failure for not meeting the so-called metrics of success—husband, house, children, thriving career. Yet, she doesn't actually want any of those things, which is such a familiar kind of female doublethink. When (spoiler alert!) she disappears, the internet scrambles to piece together who she really is.

The most cynical part of the novel is the public trajectory of Beth's disappearance, don't you think?

Absolutely. As we've seen time and again, you can be the "sweet, innocent, tragic victim" on Tuesday and, by Friday, the "dangerous, criminal, whore." I was thinking about Britney Spears, Amy Winehouse, and all the women who've been placed on pedestals only to be violently torn down by a bloodthirsty, anonymous crowd. But there's another layer to this—one that's less often discussed: the financial motivation behind it all. For every think piece that contributes (or doesn't) to the cultural conversation, a journalist is earning their dollars-per-word. Podcasts depend on advertising revenue. Anytime a private or niche pleasure is brought into the mainstream, its purity of intention gets monetized—and inevitably, it changes.


Let's talk about the club itself: on a practical level you created a lot of ground rules!


Every well-meaning organization—from the PTA to a sex-positive, ethically non-monogamous fetish club—eventually decides they need ground rules for everyone's comfort and security. And once you have a handbook, you've created a private language, which is essential for fostering a sense of belonging. Of course, wherever there are rules, there will always be someone who takes them very seriously, someone who rolls their eyes at them, and someone who sees them as nothing more than a challenge to break.

I should also mention that I'm a huge fan of heist movies—*Ocean's Eleven*, *The Italian Job*, *Logan Lucky*—and my favorite part is always the "getting the team together" montage. I wanted to bring some of that energy into the novel too—the ultimate badass gang of ordinary women with extraordinary skills you'd ever hope to meet.

They might be badasses, but you call the group of friends who form this club a "Cradle." That's a very nurturing word.

Female friendship is at the heart of this novel. In my own life, I have a group of friends who came together through a (slightly odd) shared hobby—handstands. We range in age from twenty-five to fifty, with completely different family dynamics, relationship statuses, histories, politics, and careers. On paper, we have almost nothing in common, but this crew is the most supportive group of women you could ever hope to meet.





There's something about coming together every week to do a shared activity that, over time, transforms these people into the ones you turn to during life's toughest moments.

Speaking of tough times, how do themes of terminal illness and grief shape the novel?

I started thinking about this book not long after my mum passed away. In the eight weeks leading up to her death, my sister, my dad, and I cared for her at home after the hospital told us there was nothing more they could do. It was a strange, twilight existence—life reduced to physical needs, pain relief, bodily fluids, and deciphering her thoughts when she'd summon me urgently at 4 a.m. to discuss Clerkenwell. (It turned out the dressing gown on the door reminded her of Miss Havisham, and she thought *Great Expectations* was set in Clerkenwell—and that I had lived there—none of which is true.) Some of that experience has made its way into the book.

Thinking about the players, this incredible group of nurturing women, became a distraction from my grief—our imaginations really can shield us in the darkest moments. But I also realized (with some wise insight from my sister) that when our parents die, part of the process of coming to terms with it is reshaping our identity without them. My mum had such a big personality, and so much of my sense of self was tied to her—whether I was trying to live up to her standards or rebelling against them. It was surreal, and deeply unmooring, to figure out who I am in a world without her.

Would you say that, despite the influences of friends and society, much of our sense of self is ultimately shaped by our families?

Well, it certainly influences a lot! If I'd been born in Belarus to a lion tamer and a tightrope walker, instead of to a pair of librarians in suburban Oxfordshire, maybe I would be a trapeze artist. *The Players Club* is dedicated to my mum, though I don't think she would have entirely understood it. She, Susan Mills, seemed to have no trouble believing she could do anything, just as herself. She was always learning something new, a language, a musical instrument, a sport; rallying people to support a cause or going miles out of her way to help someone in need. In the novel, Beth needs The Players Club because she isn't brave enough in her everyday life to take those kinds of risks on her own. My hope is that everyone who reads this book becomes a little more like Susan Mills—just as Beth does by the end.

LET'S KEEP IN TOUCH!

We'd love to see your Cradle in action! Tag us [@AtriaBooks](#) on all platforms, connect with the author on Instagram [@RachAldo](#), or visit RachelMills.uk to learn more.

